On Searching the Scriptures—Your Own or Someone Else's

A Reader's Guide to *Sacred Writings* and Methods of Studying Them

By Jaroslav Pelikan

SACRED WRITINGS

JUDAISM
CHRISTIANITY
ISLAM
CONFUCIANISM
HINDUISM
&
BUDDHISM

EDITED BY JAROSLAV PELIKAN

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PREFACE

Sacred Writings is a response to a widely perceived need for a convenient and nontechnical collection of some of the major Sacred Books of the major religious traditions. When the set of "The Great Books of the Western World" was first published in 1952, some critics objected to the absence of the Bible, which, they said, certainly deserved to be regarded, by any criterion, as a "great book."

The reply was that everyone could be expected to own a Bible already. Today that seems much less likely to be true, even for otherwise quite literate people, with regard to their own scriptures—in the case of most of us, the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Much less justification is there for assuming that they even have access to a Qur'ān or to the Confucian Analects. Yet these Sacred Books and their counterparts elsewhere are an indispensable lexicon for the understanding of cultures that may once have seemed far away but that today demand our attention.

When I was asked to undertake the editorship of *Sacred Writings,* my initial reaction was that it would be fundamentally misleading to put

the Confucian Analects, the Rig Veda, or the Dhammapada alongside Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures as though they were comparable entities, when they are not. The Jewish Scriptures, the Bible of Old and New Testament, and the Qur'ān are, in each case, *the* Sacred Book of the community, while the Confucian Analects, the Rig Veda, and the Dhammapada are each a part of a larger whole. But binding them together in the same set does not necessarily imply that they all have the same standing in the history of their traditions. Indeed, I became convinced that the best way to clarify not only the similarities but the differences was to put them together, both stating the differences and letting them speak for themselves.

I was also wary of trying to take on a kind of "Scriptures of the Human Race." And so let me acknowledge without apology what my own scholarly credentials are and what they are not, and on that basis let me try to be helpful to the reader in making sense of the texts. There are two kinds of scholars who have some right to enter upon such a task. The first consists of those who have made a lifelong study of the history of the major world religions—or, in the slightly old-fashioned term, "comparative religion"—such as my late lamented friends and colleagues, Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade. The second group of scholars is made up of those who approach the universal through the particular, developing an antenna for the accents of other traditions by learning that no one tradition can be understood on its own terms alone.

My own research and experience have been chiefly in the history of the interpretation of Christian Scripture, which has of course entailed considerable study of Hebrew Scripture also in its own right, as well as some study of Islamic Scripture. On the other hand, for my knowledge of these Confucian, Hindu, and Buddhist texts I am completely dependent on the work of other scholars and have acknowledged that debt in the bibliography. To a scholar whose research has always consisted in the painstaking investigation of original

sources in their original languages and then, eventually, in the interpretation of these as a connected narrative of intellectual history, it has been an unusual experience, and a humbling and disquieting one, to have been obliged to summarize and paraphrase the work of other scholars and to have to rely on them so completely as not even to have been able to verify their conclusions by independent study. But having attempted, in *A World Treasury of Modern Religious Thought,* to relate a few thinkers on whom I have worked to their contemporaries on whom I have not, I have attempted in the same spirit to relate to one another the sources on which those thinkers have drawn.

There have been several attempts at putting together collections of the sacred scriptures of humanity. One of the most widely used is Robert O. Ballou's edition of *The Bible of the World,* published in 1939. The most ambitious, still in print after almost a century, is the work of the flamboyant Friedrich Max Müller, the German-born Sanskritist at Oxford, *Sacred Books of the East,* in fifty-one volumes. The list of books that *can* be part of such a collection could, of course, be extended almost to infinity, but there are some that simply *must* be included, or at least whose traditions must be. Adding and subtracting, we have come to six traditions that must be represented on grounds of influence and importance: in the order in which they appear here, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism. One criterion that emerged was the desirability of publishing each Sacred Book in its entirety, because even the most judicious selection, being of necessity subjective, can exclude precisely the passages that may turn out to be important in some unforeseen situation. For some of the same reasons, introductory materials have been held to the barest minimum. But because these introductions are important not only to the reader of each individual book but to the reader interested in comparisons, they have been included both in the individual volumes and in this companion volume, *On Searching the Scriptures.*

The titles of the Sacred Books are those that the traditions themselves employ, at any rate when they are using English. For historical dates I have adopted the convention, except of course in quotations from other scholars, of C.E. (Common Era) and B.C.E. (Before the Common Era).

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INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDEST THOU WHAT THOU READEST?

Most inhabitants of the globe, not only in the past but also in the present, have been adherents of one or another religious tradition. Of these, the vast majority have belonged to or have been shaped by one of the six traditions represented here, namely, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. *Sacred Writings* seeks to provide decisive and influential sacred texts by which those six traditions may become more intelligible to the serious reader: the Tanakh for Judaism; the Apocrypha and the New Testament for Christianity; the Qur'ān for Islam; the Analects for Confucianism; the Rig Veda for Hinduism; and the Dhammapada for Buddhism.

Although Sigmund Freud may have felt able to dismiss religion in *The Future of an Illusion* as naive and unworthy of rational belief, the real "illusion" may well prove to have been his—the naive expectation of Western secularism that with the advance of science and enlightenment religion would "wither away" (as, according to another secular illusion, the state and the nation were supposed to do after the revolution had established the classless society). For whatever one's

existential or metaphysical attitude toward the phenomenon of religious faith may be, it is a dangerous illusion not to try to comprehend how it in fact continues to provide hundreds of millions of human beings with a worldview by which to live and die. Editorial writers, television anchorpersons, diplomats, and scholars who concern themselves with cultural diversity all too often fail to address the most fundamental and diverse beliefs in contemporary life until the realities force themselves on even the most skeptical. On the television screen we see Catholics and Protestants in Ireland clashing over the authority of the Pope, among many other things; Jews and Muslims fighting about the holy city of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, among many other things; Hindus and Pakistanis and Sikhs disputing one another's claims to temples and mosques, among many other things; Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia burning themselves in protest for the sake of their faith, among many other things. But is it adequate in explaining these phenomena always to emphasize these "many other things" and to ignore the persistent component of faith in all of them?

Almost every religious tradition with a sacred book has some version of this exchange in the New Testament (Acts 8:30–31): the question, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" and the plaintive response, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" or, in the more modern and more inclusive language of the translation employed in this set, "How can I without someone to guide me?" Significantly, this story answers a question with another question—also a hallowed religious tradition—and thus leaves the question to be asked and answered over and over again, as it has been throughout history. The disciplines, rituals, and lessons through which novices put themselves to understand their Sacred Book have often taken quite bizarre forms. But the difficulty of such an obstacle course increases geometrically if a reader proposes to do what is envisaged in this set of *Sacred Writings* and takes on six utterly distinct, perhaps mutually exclusive, Sacred Books with the ambition of being able to

give an affirmative answer to the question "Understandest thou what thou readest?" for each of them. This little book intends to be no less ambitious by providing in the first part a brief introduction, employing parallel outlines, for each of the books, and in the second part a few clues to understanding them. Thus it seeks to address and to help correct the often quite astonishing ignorance of many otherwise well-informed moderns about religion, their own or someone else's.

It would certainly be fatuous to claim that reading the Sacred Books in this set will provide the one and only key to such phenomena, but it would be no less fatuous to assume, as many seem to do, that the phenomena are intelligible apart from the faith. Some knowledge of the Sacred Book is, as the philosophers would say, a "necessary" condition even if it is not a "sufficient" condition for an understanding of the culture out of which the book has come and in which it has played a historic role. If, for the readers of this set, such a need to know is true of cultures and beliefs in distant lands, which through modern communication and modern transportation (and modern war) have suddenly become much less distant, it is preeminently true of the beliefs by which those same readers and their own culture have themselves been shaped, regardless of whether any particular reader may or may not lay claim to those beliefs personally. The bloody history of intolerance, persecution, and religious war has, quite understandably, led to the idea that any explosive as volatile as religious beliefs should probably be left alone, at least in public, and therefore that the media and the schools should avoid controversy by agreeing not to talk about it. In their accounts of the controversies of the nineteenth century about slavery and emancipation, consequently, textbooks in American history have sometimes paid scant attention either to the arguments in support of slavery that were based on biblical precedent and precept (such as "the curse of Ham" in the Book of Genesis 9:25–27) or to the moral origins of the antislavery movement not only in the Enlighten-

ment but in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and in its Bible (Mal. 2:10; Gal. 3:28).

If we want to understand one another, or even to understand ourselves, and to know (as is said in the vernacular) "where someone is coming from" on the burning social issues of the day, it is, to put it bluntly, a species of illiteracy not to acquaint ourselves with the texts that have carried such massive authority in different cultures for so many centuries. But today an acquaintance with them may no longer be taken for granted even in the cultures of which they are an integral part. Much less safe is it, therefore, to assume such an acquaintance in cultures to which the Sacred Books of other traditions have been alien, and this just at a time when, at last, schoolchildren and the general public are beginning to realize the cultural and intellectual implications of the discovery that the world is round. The art and sculpture of a culture shaped by Hinduism, the philosophy and social thought of a nation inspired by Islam, or the literature of a people brought up on Christianity are a book locked with seven seals to anyone who has not first opened another Book—in these cases, the Rig Veda, the Qur'ān, and the New Testament. Today, if a public opinion pollster were to ask a representative group of relatively well-informed Americans, "Who said, 'A house divided against itself cannot stand'?" a substantial percentage of those with any answer at all would attribute the quotation to Abraham Lincoln (Springfield, 1858) rather than to the Gospels (Matt. 12:25), from which Lincoln was quoting and which he was able to presuppose as part of the vocabulary of his audience. Even fewer contemporary Americans would pick up the resonances of the Confucian Analects in the sayings of Chairman Mao, or of the Pentateuch in the literature of twentieth-century Zionism, or of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism in the speeches of Japanese industrialists and labor leaders.

In the present climate of opinion it may be necessary to ask whether such awareness is really very important. The ultimate answer to the

question of importance probably depends on one's own faith or lack of faith, for anyone who has profound beliefs of any sort would also regard the beliefs of others as crucial—mistaken perhaps, or even fatal here in time and hereafter in eternity, but certainly not trivial. Yet some understanding of those beliefs would seem also to be crucial for an observer who regards them all as mistaken or deluded. It is only necessary to read a daily newspaper to be convinced that not only realities but also the fantasies and delusions of people can shape their view of the world and their treatment of others in ways that can be either constructive or destructive. Billions of lives are being shaped by the "delusion" of religious belief, and specifically by the tenets set forth in these six Sacred Books. If only to live intelligently in such a world, it ought to be helpful for anyone to read the Sacred Books. By an act of historical imagination we can actually participate up to a certain point in the aspirations and devotions of other times and places. Yet this truly is only up to a certain point, for the curtain is suddenly lowered and we realize with a shock just how far away those places and times really are. That experience has been called "the paradox of understanding." Hence the only way to conclude this introduction is with the questions with which it began: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" and "How can I without someone to guide me?"

I

SOURCES

1

THE TANAKH

Title. The title Tanakh is not really a word but an acronym, bringing together the initial letters in Hebrew of the three principal parts of the Jewish Scriptures: the Pentateuch (*Torah*), which is also known as the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy); the Prophets (*Nevi'im*), which includes several of the historical books (Joshua, Judges, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings), the three Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), and the twelve Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi); and the Writings (*Kethuvim*), comprising Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, I Chronicles, II Chronicles. (That is also the order in which they appear here, which differs significantly from the sequence in Christian Bibles). The plural "Scriptures" is, therefore, an accurate way to speak about what is in fact a collection of books, not a single book. That is clear also from the origin of our term "Bible": *biblia* means "books" in Greek, but Latin eventually construed the word as a

singular, and so do we. For Jews the Tanakh *is* the Bible; for Christians it is the first, and the larger, portion of the Bible, identified as "Old Testament," which presupposes that there is also a "New" Testament.

Composition and Authorship. Of the six volumes in this set of *Sacred Writings,* the collection in the Tanakh spans a far longer period of human history than does any of the others. This is true regardless of when one may date the creation of heaven and earth, for the events recounted in the Tanakh cover entire millennia of the human experience long after the creation. Even the writing of the books themselves took something over a millennium. Most of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures bear the names of the writers to whom they have traditionally been ascribed—Isaiah, Solomon, or Nehemiah, for example. In the case of the Book of Psalms, there are authors given for some individual psalms, such as Moses for Psalm 90 and above all King David for many of them, but no authors for others. By no means all of the books carry any such identification: the historical narratives of Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles are all anonymous. In some instances, most notably that of the Torah itself, the author's name does not appear in the body of the text—which refers to Moses in the third person, as does Julius Caesar in his *Commentaries*—but in the superscription, which may have been added later. The puzzle of authorship has engaged students of this Sacred Book for many centuries, with various candidates being proposed for such anonymous works as the Book of Job. But it has been characteristic of biblical scholarship since the Enlightenment that all the traditional ascriptions of authorship have come under critical scrutiny. In fact, the history of modern biblical criticism among both Jews and Christians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be said to have begun with the reexamination of the Mosaic authorship of the Torah, which most scholars today would regard as a composite work, the outcome of processes of compilation and revision that went on long after the time of Moses. Controversy continues, not only over the

results of this investigation but over the very validity of its methods. But such controversy should not be permitted, as it often has been, to deflect the attention of readers, be they devout or merely curious, from the texts themselves.

Language and Text. In the main, the text of the Tanakh is written in Hebrew (plus a few portions in Aramaic), and it is, practically speaking, the sole surviving body of ancient Hebrew literature. Although it is, obviously, impossible to pronounce any language without vowels or their equivalents, the authoritative Hebrew text itself consists only of consonants. Neophytes in the study of the text learned, as they still do, which vowels to supply where; and around the end of the fifth century C.E. a group of biblical scholars known as "Masoretes" provided a system of vowels written below the Hebrew consonants, resulting in what is now called the Masoretic Text. The editorial work of the Masoretes stood in a long succession of scribes and scholars, described for example in the Book of Ezra, who copied and transmitted the sacred text and sometimes even restored it when it had suffered accidental neglect or deliberate destruction (2 Chron. 34:14–18). The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has made available for the first time significant portions of the Hebrew Bible that antedate the work of the Masoretes by centuries, which has made possible the clarification and correction of various problematic readings. Hebrew is only one of the ancient Semitic tongues, and cognates to biblical words that appear in Ugaritic, Arabic, or other related languages may frequently illumine individual passages. In addition, various ancient translations of the Tanakh—above all the Septuagint translation into Greek (see "Translations" below), reflecting as it does a Hebrew text that is older than any complete text we now have—have served as a source for critical emendation and conjectures about what the "uncorrupted" original might have been. Needless to say, such conjectures, too, have become the occasion for vigorous polemics and discussion.

Canon and Authority. The three divisions of the Tanakh listed above

correspond to the successive stages of the process by which the several books acquired normative standing as a "canon." (A fourth division, to be discussed in chapter 2, contains those books that were at one time or another bound together with the "canonical" ones but that did not make it into the final roster for Judaism, although large parts of Christendom did grant them "deuterocanonical" standing.) As the Five Books of Moses, the Torah commanded the earliest, the highest, and the most universal respect, having evolved through the processes of editing and compiling described earlier. It achieved its status as the foundation of the faith and life of the people of Israel by five centuries or so B.C.E. It held that status, moreover, also in communities such as that of the Samaritans, who did not extend recognition to the other component parts of the Tanakh. The assembling of the books of the Prophets (*Nevi'im*), or at any rate of many of them, into an authoritative collection seems to have been going on at the same time as the fixing of the Torah, but scholars tend to date the conclusion of the process after the definition of the Torah, the rejection of their canonicity by the Samaritans being one argument in favor of a somewhat later date. As the very title Writings (*Kethuvim*) suggests, and as the character of the roster of books in this category confirms, these were works that seemed not to belong to either of the first two categories, such as the Book of Psalms (Hebrew *Sefer Tehillim,* "book of praises"). In at least some cases, they seemed so problematic as perhaps not to belong in Scripture at all: the Book of Esther, in which the word "God" does not appear; Ecclesiastes, whose pessimism, despite the ascription to King Solomon, did not seem to fit the tone of biblical religion; and, also attributed to Solomon, the Song of Songs, with its lush and erotic imagery. But eventually—traditionally it was believed to have been around the end of the first century C.E.—all the books now identified as *Kethuvim* were officially accepted by normative Judaism. Within the traditions represented in *Sacred Writings,* the authority of the Tanakh is not confined to the first volume, but

belongs directly also to the second as "Old Testament" and contributes to the third. Abraham is "the father of believers" and Moses is the bearer of divine revelation for Judaism in all its branches (as they were also for the Samaritans), for Christianity in all its denominations, and for Islam in all its varieties.

Traditional Interpretation. Canon and interpretation are closely interrelated, and they always have been. To mention the last of the problematic books just discussed, there is considerable reason to believe that the Song of Songs finally qualified for inclusion in the canon of *Kethuvim* because it was already being interpreted as an allegory of the relation of God to the people of Israel, or sometimes perhaps of the mystical relation of God to the soul, for which the relation of bride and bridegroom had frequently been a symbol. Once the Song was acknowledged, its very presence within the sacred canon was a strong argument in favor of such an allegorical and symbolic interpretation. The process of interpretation, moreover, is evidently at work already in the composition and revision of various books. One of the most fundamental of all questions of interpretation, not only for the Tanakh but for all the Sacred Books in this set and indeed everywhere, is the relation between the scriptural text and the tradition of the community (see chapter 7). By an ancient and widely held account, what God delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai was not only the tablets of the Law but a traditional and normative body of interpretation, which has since been transmitted orally. The interpretations that ultimately found their way into the collections of commentary called Mishnah and Talmud represented the ongoing process of applying biblical law to real life, often under unforeseen circumstances such as exile. A special chapter in the history of interpretation deals with biblical eschatology, the threats and promises about the future as a time of divine judgment and redemption. Because a part of the expectation of Israel about that eschatological future came to be bound up with the hope for the coming of the Messiah, Jewish interpretations of the

messianic hope both contributed to and clashed with the Christian identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah (Greek *Christos*).

Translations and This Translation. Languages, even sacred languages, have a history; they are born and they die. The Hebrew of the Tanakh lived on as a language of worship and of scholarship, but in everyday life it was largely displaced, in Palestine especially by Aramaic. This necessitated the translation of the Hebrew text into Aramaic (the so-called Targums). Outside Palestine, in the Hellenistic world, the spoken language for many Jews was Greek. In Alexandria, home of the largest Jewish colony beyond the borders of the Holy Land, both the need to make the Bible accessible to Jewish believers who could no longer handle the Hebrew text and the desire to give an account of the Jewish religion to outsiders, interested or hostile, led to the production of the most influential of all translations of the Tanakh, the Greek Septuagint, so named because seventy-two translators were said to have worked on it, each coming up with an identical translation. The inclusion in the Septuagint of books that were not accepted into the Palestinian canon led to the ambiguous status of the deuterocanonical "Apocrypha," which, because Greek-speaking Christians adopted the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew version, became part of the Christian Bible (see chapter 2). For a variety of reasons, the impulses within Judaism that had stimulated the creation of the Septuagint did not produce a continuing tradition of Jewish versions in different languages, and most of the translations of the Tanakh have been Christian. But the Jewish community in the United States—recognizing the same need that had inspired the Septuagint, to make the Bible accessible to a new generation—undertook in 1955 the preparation of a new translation into English, which was completed in installments and finally published by the Jewish Publication Society as a one-volume edition thirty years later, in 1985.

2

THE APOCRYPHA; THE NEW TESTAMENT

a. The Apocrypha

Title. Volume 2 of *Sacred Writings* contains two collections of Sacred Books that appear only in Christian Bibles. The first section of the volume, "The Apocrypha," appears in some Christian Bibles as an addendum to the books that appear in volume 1, "The Tanakh," which in Christian Bibles bears the identification "Old Testament." The standing of the books included under this category is a highly ambiguous one. That ambiguity, moreover, attends the status of these books throughout their history, as the various names of the collection suggest. "Apocrypha" means "things that are hidden." As the editors of the Apocrypha for the Revised Standard Version of the Bible have summarized the problem, "Some have suggested that the books were 'hidden' or withdrawn from common use because they were deemed to contain mysterious or esoteric lore. . . . Others have suggested that the term was employed by those who held that such books deserved to be 'hidden' because they were spurious or heretical." Another term

for them has been "deuterocanonical," indicating that even where they are accepted, they occupy a secondary position in the canon of Christian Scriptures (see "Canon" below). With the titles and in the order in which they appear here, the Apocrypha are: The First Book of Esdras; The Second Book of Esdras; Tobit; Judith; The Rest of the Chapters of the Book of Esther; The Wisdom of Solomon; Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach; Baruch; A Letter of Jeremiah; The Prayer of Azariah and The Song of the Three; Daniel and Susanna; Daniel, Bel, and the Snake; The Prayer of Manasseh; The First Book of the Maccabees; The Second Book of the Maccabees.

Composition and Authorship. Although these books, in their literary form and style, form a miscellany of Jewish religious literature, there is one characteristic that they have in common, a characteristic that also serves to define their position in the history of the Jewish and Christian Bibles, that is, their relative lateness. They are not only second in rank to the canonical books of the Tanakh/Old Testament, they are also written after most or all of them. As the title indicates, The Rest of the Chapters of the Book of Esther appeared as an addendum to the canonical Esther; The Prayer of Azariah and The Song of the Three, Daniel and Susanna, and Daniel, Bel, and the Snake were similarly addenda to the canonical Daniel. Although they stand as separate books unto themselves, The Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach are collections of sayings and proverbs that have important affinities and continuity with the canonical books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The Books of the Maccabees and I Esdras, on the other hand, approach the historiography of the canonical books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. II Esdras harks back to the apocalyptic tradition of the canonical Ezekiel and Daniel, and it anticipates the apocalypticism of the Book of Revelation in the New Testament. As most introductions to the Apocrypha point out, the one genre of the Tanakh that is missing here is the prophetic. I

Maccabees (9:27) acknowledges that these books come from a time in the history of Israel when "prophets ceased to appear among them."

Language and Text. The differences of scholarly opinion about the original language of the several books of the Apocrypha befit their heterogeneity. Some of them were written in Hebrew or Aramaic (Tobit, Judith, Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach, Baruch, I Maccabees), whereas others were written in Greek (The Rest of the Chapters of the Book of Esther, The Wisdom of Solomon, II Maccabees). In the case of several of them (I Esdras; A Letter of Jeremiah; The Prayer of Azariah and The Song of the Three; Daniel and Susanna; Daniel, Bel, and the Snake; The Prayer of Manasseh) scholars have found it impossible to decide with any certainty the question of the original language. II Esdras, for example, exists as a Latin translation of an original that seems to have been composed partly in Greek and partly in Hebrew or Aramaic. Except for some Hebrew and Aramaic versions that have been discovered over the past century or so, the Apocrypha survive chiefly as part of the Septuagint, and it is also from that Greek text that they have been translated.

Canon and Authority. The most prominent feature of these books historically, and the one that binds them together, is their dubious canonicity and authority. It does appear anachronistic to speak of a "canon" in connection with the Septuagint; for in it, as well as in the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the twentieth century, books that were later to be defined as "canonical" appear alongside others that were not, with no obvious differentiation among them. As chapter 1 pointed out, the eventual canonization of the Tanakh by the Jewish community excluded these dubious books while ultimately including some about which there had been question. But it is a measure of the rapid and all but total alienation between the Jewish and the Christian communities that very few Christians after the end of the first century of the Common Era could read Hebrew, so that effectively the

Septuagint became "the Christian Tanakh"; its readings (and misreadings) and its "canon" prevailed in the Church. Doubts remained, the strongest doubts being, significantly, those of Christian scholars like Jerome (d. 420 C.E.), who did know Hebrew and who did have associations with Jewish scholarship. Those doubts found a powerful echo in the Protestant Reformers, whose emphasis on the authoritativeness of the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible, inspired by Renaissance humanism, carried over also to the Hebrew canon. It was in response to Protestant criticism that the Roman Catholic Council of Trent in 1546, and then the Eastern Orthodox Synod of Jerusalem in 1672, for the first time made most of the books of the Apocrypha an official part of the Christian canon of the Old Testament.

Traditional Interpretation. The Christian interpretation of the Apocrypha, like the interpretation of the "rest" of the Old Testament, has been decisively affected by the tradition of prophecy and fulfillment. According to this tradition, the history of the New Testament and the subsequent history of the Church are the divine performance of that which had been promised before the coming of Christ. Conversely, the rejection of their canonicity by Protestant Christians caused them to be neglected not only by believers in the pew, but by scholars, and even to be omitted altogether from most printings of the English Bible. From both sides, the sharp antitheses of the Reformation period have softened in recent decades, as the inclusion of the Apocrypha in both the Revised Standard Version and the Revised English Bible indicates.

Translations and This Translation. In a real sense, it is to the accident of translation that many of the books of the Apocrypha owe their very survival, for the Greek Septuagint and then the Latin Vulgate have been responsible for their preservation and circulation. In spite of their rejection of the canonicity and authority of these books, moreover, the biblical translators of the Reformation era did include them in their

editions, usually with some warning that they were not worthy of being put on the same level with the canonical Scriptures. (See below, under "The New Testament," for the origins of the translation being included here.)

b. The New Testament

Title. The New Testament is well-nigh universal as the title for the specifically Christian portion of the Scriptures, although such titles as "New Law" also appear in some languages. The word "testament" means "covenant," and is so used in older English translations of the words of Jesus that were the first to be written down (1 Cor. 11:25): "This cup is the new testament in my blood." But the title seems not to have been used about a book—or, again, more precisely a collection of books—until a body of normative Christian writings was placed alongside the body of writings inherited from Judaism. Together these formed a Christian Scripture, made up of the records of the two covenants of God as these had been distinguished by the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 3:6), the "Old Testament" and the "New Testament." Similarly, the word "gospel," meaning "good news," referred first to a message and only later to the fourfold book with which the New Testament opens. The title "scripture," when it appears in the New Testament, obviously refers in most instances only to the "Old Testament," there being no "New Testament" in existence yet; but once there was a Christian Bible with two Testaments, terms like "scripture" and "word of God" came to be applied to this Bible in its entirety.

Composition and Authorship. The oldest and the most numerous books of the New Testament are the letters of the apostle Paul, which traditionally are thirteen in number: Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon.

They are addressed to specific congregations or individuals and usually were written in response to very specific needs and occasions. Distinguished from these as "general letters" or "catholic epistles" are those seven, bearing the names of other leaders of the early church, that were not addressed so specifically: James, I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude. The "Letter to Hebrews," as it is labeled here, has neither a title nor a writer's name as part of its text, but it received that designation because of its method of argumentation on the basis of an extensive use of the Jewish Scriptures. The four Gospels—or rather, the one Gospel in its four renderings—likewise have no writer's names, but they have traditionally been attributed to Matthew (one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus), John Mark (a disciple of the apostle Peter), Luke ("the doctor" mentioned in Col. 4:14), and John (also one of the twelve). As the account of the life and teachings of Jesus, whom Christian faith identifies as the Messiah or Christ of God and thus as the "founder" in a unique sense (see chapter 10), the Gospels have pride of place within the New Testament. The Acts of the Apostles is a continuation, by the same writer, of the narrative in the Gospel of Luke. The Revelation of John, traditionally ascribed to the writer of the Fourth Gospel and of the three epistles bearing that name, is a Christian apocalypse in the succession of Ezekiel, Daniel, and The Second Book of Esdras.

Language and Text. Although there has been a persistent scholarly rumor about Aramaic originals, particularly for the Gospel of Matthew, the New Testament was written in Greek—not the classical Greek of Plato and Sophocles but the everyday Greek of the Mediterranean world, hence called Koine, meaning "common." Several of the writers of the New Testament, notably Paul, were themselves of Jewish origin; some of the traditions, oral and perhaps written, upon which various of them drew were Aramaic; and most of them knew and used the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. For all of these reasons, much of the Greek of the New Testament has the strong

flavor of translation about it. History has handed down to us none of the original manuscripts of the books of the New Testament, but it has preserved literally thousands of copies in manuscript, together with early quotations from the New Testament and early translations of it. The net result of this process of transmission is a welter of variant readings that, it seems safe to say, is unmatched in the history of Western literature. Coping with these textual variants, the most important of which are reflected in the footnotes of our edition, has been the task of many generations of scholars and scribes, and has helped to develop the science of textual criticism, which has in turn been applied to the editing of the works of other writers, ancient and modern (see chapter 8).

Canon and Authority. Already in the later books of the New Testament there are some indications that the letters of Paul and the sayings of Jesus were being preserved, copied, and circulated as "scripture," but in the absence of a centralized legislative body there appears to have been great variety and a form of local option in the use of such collections. It was, at least in part, the challenge of other writings purporting to be on the same level that provoked from the leaders of the Church some of the earliest compilations of lists of authoritative "apostolic" books. Many of the books now included were on all of those lists; some books, such as Hebrews, James, and Revelation, were in doubt, whereas some that eventually did not qualify, such as the First Letter of Clement and the Letter of Barnabas, did appear in some collections and do appear in some New Testament manuscripts. As authoritative scripture, the New Testament took its place alongside the "Old," but the writings of such Christian leaders as Irenaeus of Lyons at the end of the second century indicate that the process by which its authority acquired universal recognition was part of an evolution in which the authority of the bishop and the authority of tradition were linked to the authority of the Bible.

Traditional Interpretation. That definition of the authority of the

New Testament has also decisively shaped its traditional interpretation, through the circular argument that the creedal and liturgical tradition of the Church was based on the New Testament but that the New Testament was to be interpreted in such a way as to harmonize with the creedal and liturgical tradition of the Church. Because the first part of this argument carried the force that the authority of Scripture was supreme though it was not the sole authority, the interpretation of the Bible has always held a special place in the life and thought, the preaching and worship, of the Christian community. Throughout Christian history, when voices of renewal and reform have been heard, they have come in the name of the original revelation contained in the New Testament, even though their interpretation of it was novel or revolutionary.

Translations and This Translation. The New Testament has been translated into well over a thousand languages, and into some of these many times. Coming as they did at crucial points in the history of their languages, many of these translations have shaped the vocabulary and style of succeeding generations. They have also repeatedly become archaic, with the result that new versions have continued to appear. The English-speaking world has been particularly rich in producing these versions, among which the Authorized ("King James") Version of 1611 has long occupied a position of special honor, even for those who no longer find its language completely intelligible. The translation of the New Testament (and that of the Apocrypha) in these *Sacred Writings* is taken from the Revised English Bible, which appeared in 1989 as a far-reaching revision of the New English Bible, whose New Testament was originally published in 1961. The Revised English Bible was a cooperative venture involving several denominations and many scholars. One of the reasons for its success is that when the scholars had finished their work, the translations were vetted by a group of literary advisers, who tested them for style and idiom.

3

THE QUR'AN

Title. The title Qur'ān, as used here for volume 3 of *Sacred Writings*, is a more accurate transliteration of the original Arabic title than was the older and more familiar English rendering "Koran," because the initial letter in Arabic is a "qāf" rather than a "kāf." Therefore "Qur'ān" has increasingly found acceptance in English usage, being listed in some English dictionaries as a variant of "Koran" but in others now as the first spelling. The word itself means "recitation" in Arabic. The Qur'ān refers to itself as "the Book" (15:1) and as "the Book free of doubt and involution" (2:2). In it God says about the Qur'ān as scripture: "So have We revealed to you the Qur'ān by Our command. You did not know what the Scripture was before, nor (the laws of) faith" (45:52; see also the translator's note to that passage in our edition). Although each of the six Sacred Books in this series occupies a special place in the spirituality of its own community, it is probably fair to say that Islam and the Qur'ān are coextensive in a sense that is not as true for any of the others. As Muhammad Husayn Haykal said of the Prophet: "Upon the Moslems he desperately sought to

impress that his humanity was like unto theirs, inspired though he surely was. He knows no miracle save that of the Koran." While we are on the subject of proper titles, there are a few other differences that should probably also be pointed out: "Muhammad" is preferable to "Mohammed" as the transliteration of the Prophet's name and has been coming into general use; "Muslim" should replace "Moslem" as well as the Anglicized Persian or Turkish "Mussulman," not to mention the invidious term "Mohammedan"; and "Allah" in Arabic is the name of the one God, Lord of heaven and earth, not of one god among others, and therefore Christian Arabs employ this title to refer to the trinitarian God in whom they as Christians believe, not merely to the God of the Muslims and the Qur'ān.

Composition and Authorship. The Qur'ān's own answer to the question of its composition and authorship seems, at least on the surface, to be a simple and direct one. As one of the final surahs puts it, "Read, for your Lord is most beneficent, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know" (96:3–5). Therefore God did not merely reveal or inspire the Qur'ān; "by the pen" God wrote the Qur'ān, which is, consequently, "only revelation communicated, bestowed on him by the Supreme Intellect" (53:4–5). This passivity of the Prophet in relation to the sovereignty of the divine initiative is a recurring theme in the Qur'ān itself and in the subsequent Muslim tradition. It does not imply, however, that we are completely uninformed about the circumstances of the composition of the Qur'ān. In the apt formulation of Fazlur Rahman, "The Qur'ān is, therefore, purely divine. . . . The Qur'ān is thus pure Divine Word, but, of course, it is equally intimately related to the innermost personality of the Prophet Muhammad whose relationship to it cannot be mechanically conceived like that of a record. The Divine Word flowed through the Prophet's heart." It did so in a series of incandescent divine self-disclosures, beginning in about the year 610 C.E. and continuing to near the end of the Prophet's life in 632. These revelations are, to orthodox Muslim

belief, the very voice of God. In them Muhammad was designated "a benevolence to the creatures of the world," whose message it was to say, "This is what has been revealed to me: 'Your God is one and only God'" (21:107–8). Muhammad memorized many of these sayings, as did a multitude of his followers; other sayings seem to have been written down right away, in whatever medium was at hand. The collecting of the Qur'ān is attributed to Abū Bakr, the first caliph, and the standard version to 'Uthmān, the third caliph, who established the textual tradition at Medina as the normative one and who also fixed the sequence of the 114 surahs, more or less from the longest to the shortest. Many Western scholars tend to think that the Qur'ān in its present form began to be set down about 650 C.E., but that the text was not definitively fixed until the tenth century of the Common Era.

Language and Text. The Qur'ān is written in Arabic, which thereby became a sacred language, even for those Muslims who are not Arabs. As Muhammad Abduh said, "In the early epoch of Islam, scholars . . . came to the conclusion that the faith will not endure without the Koran. To this verdict further confirmation was added when the intermingling of the Arab with other races was under way. Like their Arab coreligionists, foreign converts to Islam came to appreciate the imperative need to retain the integrity of the Arabic language." It is specifically this Arabic Qur'ān that is identified by God as "the immaculate Book" (12:1–3), and no translation of it into any language can lay claim to a status in any way approaching the Arabic original (see also "Translations" below). Although Arabic, spoken and written, has naturally continued to evolve as a language, or really as several languages in various parts of the Middle East, "classical" Arabic continues to be defined, both by Muslims and by Western scholars, first of all in Qur'ānic terms. Muslim grammars, lexicons, and other linguistic aids for classical Arabic have sometimes tended to restrict themselves to the sacred text itself, with a corresponding suspicion toward parallels from other languages, literatures, and reli-

gions. Because of the reverence for it as verbally inspired, the transmission of the Arabic text, once this was fixed, has been carried out by Muslim scribes over the centuries with great care (see also chapter 9). That reverence, combined as it is with a revulsion from idolatry and from anthropomorphic depictions of the Divine in any form, has been responsible for the creativity of Arabic calligraphy, samples of which are visible in the margins of our edition.

Canon and Authority. The authority of the Qur'ān is the authority of the Prophet, which is the authority of God. "O you who believe," it declares, "obey God and the Prophet, and do not waste your deeds" (47:33). To be a believer and not to waste one's deeds means to find in the authoritative Qur'ān, correctly interpreted and properly understood, and in the light of reason, all the instruction and guidance needed for the concrete decisions of life. But because the Qur'ān—like the Torah of the Jewish Tanakh, but unlike the Christian New Testament—contains many specific "theocratic" provisions about the ordering of political, social, and economic life for a whole nation and its rulers as well as their subjects, its authority has direct and immediate bearing on the entire fabric of existence, corporate as well as individual; in the Qur'ān "all affairs are sorted out and decided as commands" from God (44:4–5). Therefore the Qur'ān legislates specific ordinances for marriage, sex, and divorce; it has much to say about slavery and war; and it prescribes rules of procedure for law courts and trials, "civil" as well as "ecclesiastical." The history of Islamic civilization in the more than thirteen centuries counted by the Muslim calendar (which begins with 16 July 622 C.E., the date of the Hegira of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina) provides rich documentation of the applicability of the Qur'ān's authority across an enormous spectrum of social structures in Europe, Asia, and Africa. The efforts to apply that authority with greater rigor to various societies have constituted a portentous new chapter in the history of the final decades of the twentieth century.

Traditional Interpretation. The high doctrine of the origin and authority of the Qur'ān, like analogous doctrines of biblical inspiration in other faiths, could lead to diametrically opposed systems of interpretation. It could be taken to imply either that the task of later generations consisted of determining as precisely as possible what the text meant and adhering strictly to that meaning, or that the determination of such a meaning should serve as the basis to elaborate an extension of the sense to its very limits. Sunni and Shi'a, the two great sectarian divisions within Islam—which are, in the first instance, defined by the question of whether the legitimate succession from the Prophet lies with the first four caliphs, as Sunni Muslims hold, or whether it lies with Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, and with the divinely inspired imams whom God has appointed to follow him, as Shi'ite Muslims teach—diverge also on this issue of the proper methodology for the traditional interpretation of the Qur'ān. "In its simplest manifestation," as Edward J. Jurji has described it, "the cleavage here rested on whether *tawil* (interpretation) was to be made synonymous with *tafsir* (exegesis), following the Koran and the Tradition, as the Sunnites maintained, or to be turned into an allegorical exposition, capable of wringing from the text far-reaching implications concealed from the reader, in the Shiite style." In addition, the tradition of ascetic mysticism usually identified as Sūfī, whose best-known and most influential spokesman was probably the medieval writer al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 C.E.), developed its own special method of interpreting the Qur'ān as a mystical rather than merely a legal text.

Translations and This Translation. The privileged position accorded to Arabic as the sacred language has led, as a direct corollary, to a profound hesitancy about rendering the text of the Qur'ān into any other language, even into the languages of the Islamic peoples themselves, such as Urdu or Persian, much less into those of the outside world. Such translations have nevertheless repeatedly appeared. Thus it was at the behest of Peter the Venerable, the abbot of the monastery

at Cluny, that the Qur'ān was translated into Latin for the first time, in 1143. This Latin translation and those that followed sometimes served as the basis for versions in other Western tongues, but the scholarly study of Arabic at Western universities since the eighteenth century has made it possible to produce translations directly from the original. George Sale (d. 1736), one of the British scholars responsible for the translation of the New Testament into Arabic, was also the first to translate the Qur'ān directly from Arabic into English (1734). The present translation is the work of the Pakistani man of letters Ahmed Ali, whose collection and translation of Urdu poetry, *The Golden Tradition*, has been widely received in the West. For reasons that have already been stated, the Qur'ān is being presented here in a bilingual edition, with the original Arabic in the margins alongside the corresponding lines in English.

4

THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS

Title. A majority of the titles being used here for the Sacred Books (Tanakh, Qur'ān, Rig Veda, Dhammapada) are transliterations, more or less, from the original languages in which those works were composed: Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit, and Pali. By contrast, the term "Analects," which has, thanks to the work of James Legge (see "Translations" below), come to be so totally identified with Confucianism that it is seldom met with anymore in any other context, is, of all things, a Greek word, referring to any miscellaneous collection and then specifically to a literary one. Thus the *Oxford English Dictionary* renders it as: "Literary gleanings; collections of fragments or extracts. (Usually as a title)," and then refers to Confucius. The Chinese title is *Lun Yü*, which means, as our translator here, Arthur Waley, renders it, "Selected Sayings," so that "Analects" proves to be still a reasonably acceptable equivalent in English. Several translators and commentators have pointed out that the first part of the title, the word *Lun*, appears within the text of the Analects itself (14:9), where it refers to the process of editing a document. As Benjamin I. Schwartz has put it,

"The consensus among modern scholars is that our most reliable source for the early Confucian school, if not for the vision of the master himself, is the collection of brief dialogues and gnomic utterances in the collection called in Chinese the *Lun-Yü*, translated by Legge as *Analects*, and by Waley as 'Selected Sayings.'" The name "Confucius" is also of Western origin, being a Latinized form of the Chinese K'ung Fu-tzu.

Composition and Authorship. According to the generally accepted chronology, about which some scholars have nevertheless raised questions, Confucius was born in 551 B.C.E. and died in 479. As is true of several other Sacred Books in this series, the composition of the Analects may be said to have taken place in two stages, oral and written. In one sense they were composed in the course of their being spoken, supposedly by Confucius himself. The debates that have raged among scholars about the authenticity of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels, or for that matter to Socrates in the dialogues of Plato, have their counterpart here in the study of the Analects. Thus our translator is sure, commenting on Analects 13:3, that "the whole of this highly elaborate, literary paragraph bears the stamp of comparatively late date." According to the text itself, in a passage to which the commentators have given a great deal of attention, "The Master seldom spoke of profit or fate or Goodness" (9:1). But in fact there is much in the Analects at any rate about Goodness. Many of the sayings appear as answers to questions that are put to Confucius by one or another of his disciples or by a critic. The same question can come from more than one source, with each of the Master's replies carrying a distinct nuance (2:5–8). Sometimes, we are told, these questions were meant "half playfully," and his response came "in the same playful spirit" (6:24). On the other hand, many of the sayings seem to have been composed as free discourse, without direct provocation. And some sayings (e.g., 19:17–18) explicitly take the form of secondary quotations by later scribes, while Books 10 and 20 are, in the main, not

primarily attributed to him. From these we may begin to surmise something about the process of "composition" in the second sense, the writing down and collecting of sayings and stories by various of the students whose names—though often little or nothing else—we know from the pages of the Analects.

Language and Text. Being a compilation from what seems to have been such a broad range of sources, oral as well as written, the Analects existed in widely variant texts long after the death of the Master. From historical accounts it appears that, in addition to the standard version generally identified as that of "the state of Lu," there were in the second century B.C.E. at least two others, both of which have since been lost: an ancient script version, divided into twenty-one books, and the version of "the state of Ch'i," divided into twenty-two books. Modern critical scholars have suggested, quite plausibly, that many of the individual sayings and maxims preserved in the Analects have acquired, in the course of repetition and interpretation, explanatory contexts after the fact, and that therefore the answers attributed to Confucius in the text may in fact have been older than the questions attributed to his disciples. Once it was set in its present form, however, the text of the Analects appears to have been the object of the same kind of tender loving care that has been invested in the texts of the other Sacred Books collected in these *Sacred Writings*. Like those other Sacred Books, the Analects is replete with archaic and technical terms, over whose explication Confucian scholars and Western Sinologists have expended great effort, none more laborious than that of translators compelled to find equivalents in a linguistic, philosophical, and religious tradition altogether alien to the language and spirit of the Chinese of the Analects. But even native-born Chinese scholars describe how they have puzzled over single words and individual ideograms that seem to bear no connection to present-day language. For that reason among others we have, in the case of the Analects, included the translator's introduction, additional notes and textual notes.

Canon and Authority. Once again with a caveat about not applying uncritically the special connotations with which the term "canon" is freighted in Western usage, especially in Christian usage, it is necessary to locate the Analects within the total context of the canon of "the Chinese Classics," of which it is only one, albeit the one that is the most familiar to Western readers. The most comprehensive list embraces thirteen titles, which in their Chinese titles (and English translations of the titles, as given by Wing-Tsit Chan) are: *I Ching*, "Classic of Changes"; *Shu Ching*, "Classic of History"; *Shih Ching*, "Classic of Poetry"; *Chou li*, "Rites of Chou"; *I li*, "Ceremonies and Rituals"; *Li chi*, "Record of Rites"; *Tso chuan*, "Tso's Commentary"; *Kung-yang chuan*, "Kung-yang's Commentary"; *Ku-liang chuan*, "Ku-liang's Commentary"; *Lun Yü*, "Analects"; *Hsiao Ching*, "Classic of Filial Piety"; *Erh ya*, "Near to Correctness," a dictionary; and *Meng-tzu*, "Mencius," which is the Latinized form of the name of a Chinese sage from the fourth century B.C.E. Although the Analects do not belong to the shorter lists of the Five, the Six, or the Nine Chinese Classics, their particular appeal, and in this sense a special authority, stems from their presenting the "sayings of the Master"—a title that could be and has been applied as well to Deuteronomy, the Four Gospels, the Qur'ān, and the Dhammapada. Confucian tradition credits Confucius with having assembled and edited several of these "Classics." Here in the Analects, moreover, the Master says of himself, "I am simply one who loves the past and who is diligent in investigating it" (7:19). There are repeated references to "the Books" (e.g., 14:43), ancient writings whose authority the Master seems to acknowledge and to whose explication he applies himself, his interpretation thereby having become normative.

Traditional Interpretation. It would seem that there is no more appropriate way to address this question than to repeat the summary of recent scholarship by the translator of the Analects in this edition, Arthur Waley: "There are two main interpretations of the *Analects*,

the 'old' and the 'new.' The old interpretation is that of the *Lun Yü Chi Chieh*, 'Collected Explanations of the *Lun Yü*,' presented to the throne by a committee of scholars about A.D. 240. . . . The old interpretation, in all its essentials at any rate, held the field until the second half of the twelfth century. Hitherto the *Analects* had been a scripture among other scriptures, studied by those who were adept in ancient literature. But in the Sung dynasty it became a school-book, and finally not merely *a* school-book, but *the* school-book, basis of all education. This transformation was due almost entirely to the efforts of one very remarkable man, Chu Hsi (A.D. 1130–1200). . . . Chu Hsi has been called a great scholar, but no one would call him so who had any experience of the difference between scholarship and theology. For though Chu Hsi was not a theologian in the literal sense of the term, though he is concerned with a Truth rather than with a God, his methods are at every point those of the theologian, not those of the scholar. It was not his aim to discover, as a scholar would have done, what the Classics meant when they were written. . . . Chu Hsi's task was to make this hidden Truth, ensconced in the Classical books, accessible to everybody."

Translations and This Translation. By far the most influential translation of Confucius into English—in the opinion of some scholars, the most influential into any Western language—was that of James Legge, who, after having been a missionary to the Chinese and the head of the Anglo-Chinese College in Hong Kong, where he lived for thirty years, became the first professor of Chinese at Oxford. Between 1861 and 1886 Legge published a massive translation of the *Chinese Classics*, with introductions, notes, and commentaries, in twenty-eight volumes. With the exception of the monumental work edited by Max Müller, *Sacred Books of the East* (see chapter 5, under "Language and Text"), to which Legge contributed the six volumes of "The Sacred Books of China," Legge's work is unmatched for scope and ambition, before or since, and his rendering of the Analects is the one

on which generations of English-speaking students have been reared. While acknowledging his own debt to Legge, Arthur Waley, previously known best for his translation of the *Tale of Genji*, has produced in the present translation a fresh new reading, which, as he puts it, "attempts to tell the European reader not what the book means to the Far East of to-day, but what it meant to those who compiled it."

5

THE RIG VEDA

Title. The title Rig Veda has long since permanently established itself in English usage, whether scholarly or popular. From time to time there have been slight variations in transliteration and in the use of diacritical marks for the Sanskrit characters, including the rendering "Ṛgveda" employed by Griffith for the translation we are using. An early reference to the Rig Veda in English, dated 1776, identifies it as "the Reig Beid," but soon thereafter it was being called "the Rig-véda." The more complete official title is *Rig Veda Samhitā.* The Sanskrit word *veda* means "knowledge," especially sacred knowledge, and therefore might in some ways be rendered more appropriately with the English word "wisdom." In modern Slovak, my mother tongue, *veda* is still the word for "knowledge," and the Indo-European root is also reflected in *wissen*, the German verb "to know," as well as in the English word *wit.* "Veda" is used as the title not only for Rig Veda, but for the other three primary books of revelation in Hinduism: Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, and Atharva Veda (see "Canon" below). Among the four, the Rig Veda is, in the words of our translator, Ralph

T. H. Griffith, "the oldest, the most important, and the most generally interesting." *Rig* is a transliteration, more or less accurate, of the Sanskrit word for "praise"; it appears to be a reflection of the central place occupied here by the element of praise and prayer, "Mantra," which together with its correlative of "Brahmana" ("critical reflection" or "rational contemplation") may be said to constitute the core of Vedic religion and philosophy, especially that of the Rig Veda: "The sages make their voices heard with hymns" (10:64.15).

Composition and Authorship. There are just over one thousand hymns in the Rig Veda, comprising a total of something more than ten thousand verses. Although some collections of the Rig Veda in the tradition of India have based their groupings of its verses on a distribution creating eight sections of roughly equal length, the principle followed here has sought to employ the historic origins of the material as the basis for the grouping, which has produced the ten books offered here. As the notes to the present edition indicate, the Hindu religious and literary tradition has identified some of the seers to whom it ascribes the composition, under the sway of divine inspiration, of various of the Vedic hymns. Thus there are in Book 1 sixteen such seers altogether, the first two hymns being attributed to "Madhucchandās Vaiśvāmitra, a son or descendant of the famous Viśvāmitra," the hymns from the twelfth to the twenty-third inclusive to "Medhātithi, son of Kanva," and so on. Sanskritists are largely in agreement, however, that many, perhaps most, of these hymns, like their counterparts in others of the traditions represented in these *Sacred Writings*, were both composed orally and transmitted orally long before being set down in written form; to the present day they are memorized and recited by devout Hindus as oral tradition. That oral emphasis is indicated by the very use of the general title "śruti" ("that which was heard") for the collection of the four Vedas, and it is reflected, for example, in such a formula as this: "O Indra, Lord of Hundred Powers, with all our songs we invocate Thy names"

(3:37.3). The identification of the writers as "seers," moreover, emphasizes their passive role as instruments for the several deities whose praises the Rig Veda sings, which must significantly modify the use of a modern and secular term like "author" for them: "These holy songs he [Indra] taught the bard who praised him" (3:34.5). Because of the strict requirement that the hymns be recited with precise observance of every detail, and with the rituals attending the recitation being scrupulously followed (e.g., 8:31.1–2), the composition—or compilation—of the Rig Veda and its related materials must be understood in the light of the liturgical requirements of the older Vedic religion and of the Brahmanism and Hinduism that succeeded it.

Language and Text. The language of the Rig Veda is usually identified as a dialect of archaic Sanskrit, for which it and the other three Vedas form the principal corpus of literature. Because of its vital importance as the oldest Indo-European language for which a large body of written literature has been preserved, Sanskrit (and the Vedic dialect in connection with it) is seen as fundamental to the history of all the Indo-European language families. As a consequence of its linguistic interest, therefore, the Rig Veda has been the object of intense attention not only from scholars of India or of Hindu religion and philosophy, but from scholars of Greek, Latin, Germanic, and Slavic comparative philology. Sanskrit grammars and lexicons, intended principally for students of linguistics, may often illumine the religious and liturgical significance of individual passages in the Rig Veda, as the editor's notes to many of the hymns (e.g., 7:97) make clear. There nevertheless remain many difficulties, linguistic as well as textual, for both Eastern and Western scholars (see, as one example among many, 8:52.1, with the translator's note).

In any consideration of the language and text of the Rig Veda, it is impossible not to speak about the work of one of the most widely celebrated of modern scholars and popularizers in the history of religions, Friedrich Max Müller. Max Müller is best known for editing

the fifty-one volume *Sacred Books of the East*, published by the Clarendon Press between 1879 and 1910, a collection of, as he himself described them, "translations of all the most important works of the seven non-Christian religions [, which] have exercised a profound influence on the civilizations of the continent of Asia." Less well known to the general public was his work as editor of the Sanskrit text of the Rig Veda in six volumes, which came out between 1849 and 1874. Vedic scholars both in India and in the West have expressed their admiration for this edition, because he established the original text of the Rig Veda in accordance with the canons of critical philology. It was Max Müller's edition that served as the basis of the present translation by Ralph T. H. Griffith (see "Translations" below).

Canon and Authority. The Rig Veda is the oldest of the four Vedas that comprise the central "canon" of the older Vedic religion and of the Brahmanism that emerged from it, the other three being, as already mentioned: Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, and Atharva Veda. The four Vedas taken together, as Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa has summarized their position, "constitute the 'revealed' ('Śruti,' or 'that which was heard') literature, and they provide the basis of religious authority in Hindu orthodoxy." But it is in keeping with the genius of Hinduism, as Kitagawa immediately goes on to point out, that it "has never insisted on the acceptance of any one interpretation of its doctrines" and that therefore such a term as his phrase "religious authority in Hindu orthodoxy" must not be understood according to Western theological categories. Nevertheless, what makes the Rig Veda part of that "canon" and invests it with that "authority" is its very adaptability to the Hindu refusal to fix a creed or dogma. In a familiar formula from Book 1 of the Rig Veda, which has often been quoted by those who would interpret Hindu religion as implicitly monotheistic, "They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutmān. To what is One, sages give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan" (1:164.46). To understand the authority of the Rig

Veda, it is also necessary to keep constantly in mind its location within the body of Sanskrit literature (see chapter 11); for not only does it, especially in its later books, contain elements that strike the outside reader as "secular"—a term that is at best anachronistic in this context—but the Rig Veda and the other Vedas occupy a place in the national culture that is analogous in some respects to that of the several epics in various other national literatures, including the Greek and the Nordic.

Traditional Interpretation. The distinction mentioned earlier, between Mantra as praise and prayer and Brahmana as critical reflection or rational contemplation, has also shaped the traditional interpretation of the Rig Veda. The Brahmanas are normative commentaries on the several Vedas, explaining in prose the imagery of the Vedic hymns and prescribing ritual, while Aranyakas, a title usually translated as "Forest Texts," present interpretations of the Mantras and of ritual that are sometimes characterized as "mystical." The most widely known of the commentaries, which are in fact compositions in their own right, are the Upanishads, in which the language of the Vedas serves as the basis for cosmological and philosophical ideas that are in some respects already anticipated here in the Rig Veda (see 3:54.8, and the translator's note there). The designation of the Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads as "śruti" forms of revelation has its counterpart in the body of Sanskrit literature called "śmriti," meaning "that which is remembered," of which the best known to Western readers is the Bhagavad Gita. As is the case with other Sacred Books, such as the Tanakh and the Qur'ān, the eminence of these books as monuments of the culture of India means that they form part of the education even of those who do not conform to the orthodox tradition. For example, when Mohandas K. Gandhi was growing up, as he says in his autobiography, he "read with interest Max Müller's book, *India—What Can It Teach Us?* and the translation of the *Upanishads* published by the Theosophical Society"; that reading, Mahatma Gandhi contin-

ues, "enhanced my regard for Hinduism, and its beauties began to grow upon me. It did not, however, prejudice me against other religions."

Translations and This Translation. Horace Hayman Wilson, professor of Sanskrit at Oxford and author of a *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* published in 1819, undertook a translation of large parts of the Rig Veda into English, which began to appear in 1850. But Friedrich Max Müller's work on the original Sanskrit text of the Rig Veda made it possible for Ralph T. H. Griffith to prepare a complete English translation, whose preface is dated 25 May 1889. He published an improved edition in 1896. So well established has Griffith's rendition of the Rig Veda become that it was taken as the basis for the modern Indian edition of the Rig Veda in English, published at Delhi in 1973 and again in 1976. For these reasons, and because it presents the complete Rig Veda rather than merely selections from it, the Griffith version is the one being presented here, but the reader should be aware that there are several renderings of such selections into English, among which the sprightly and erudite collection by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty for Penguin Books is especially appealing.

6

THE DHAMMAPADA

Title. The Dhammapada is undoubtedly the least familiar of all the titles of Sacred Books in this set. It is also perhaps the most obscure in its original meaning, as both Buddhist scholars and Western Buddhologists have acknowledged. The two parts of the compound word are "dhamma" and "pada." As Friedrich Max Müller explained in the introduction to his translation of the work in *Sacred Books of the East*, first published in 1881: "'Dhamma' has many meanings. Under one aspect it means religion, particularly the religion taught by Buddha, the law which every Buddhist should accept and observe. Under another aspect 'dhamma' is virtue, or the realisation of the law." The word "pada" is interpreted more explicitly in the text of the Dhammapada itself: "The path to the Deathless is awareness; unawareness, the path of death" (21). As the commentary explains, "the path: *padam*" refers to "the means, the way." Max Müller suggested the translation "footstep of religion," but added that "it cannot be denied that the title of Dhammapada was very soon understood in a different sense also, namely, as 'Sentences of Religion.'" The translators of our

version here, John Ross Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana, propose: "The title *Dhammapada* means 'sayings of dhamma'—that is, religiously inspiring statements thought to have been made by the Buddha on various occasions." They go on to explain: "The word 'dhamma' means the literary corpus of canonical teaching. . . . The word 'pada' means support." As suggested earlier, therefore, some such title as "The Sayings of the Master" would, without doing unforgivable violence to the original, cover the sayings of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy, the sayings of Jesus in the Four Gospels, the sayings of Muhammad in the Qur'ān, the sayings of Confucius in the Analects, and the sayings of Gotama Buddha here in the Dhammapada.

Composition and Authorship. The foundation of Buddhism was not written but oral, in the preaching of Gotama Buddha during the sixth century B.C.E.; more precise dating than this seems difficult to achieve. The Dhammapada appears to be referring to this preaching when it speaks of "a well-spoken word fruitful for one who does it" (52); as the commentary on this passage explains, "the 'well-spoken word' means the Word of the Buddha contained in the three *pitakas*." Already during his lifetime, the sayings of Gotama were being memorized and repeated by his disciples. These have survived in many versions and recensions, of which the Dhammapada is one of the most widely received. Such versions of the teachings of Gotama, often introduced with the formula "Thus have I heard," inextricably combine authentic original sayings with the development of later tradition. They differ widely not only in their content but in their literary form. A large number of them are in prose, cast in the form of a discourse by the Master and an acknowledgment by the hearer. The sayings in the Dhammapada, however, are arranged in verse structure, whether or not they were in fact spoken that way originally, at least partly as a mnemonic device and as a basis for ritual recitation. Reducing all of this oral tradition to written form must have taken several centuries after the life of Gotama Buddha, and stabilizing the

written versions of the many components of Buddhist scripture into a "canon," or actually into several canons, took even longer (see "Canon" below). In the case of the material in the Dhammapada, the codification and circulation of the work resulted in its wide circulation and broad acceptance, and various individual verses have parallels and echoes throughout Buddhist literature of sayings attributed to the Buddha. As Carter and Palihawadana point out in their introduction, besides this Pali version to which the specific title "Dhammapada" applies, "other Buddhist schools that originated in India also seem to have had their own versions of this text, of which only three are extant at the present time—the *Udānavarga* in Sanskrit, the *Gāndhārī Dharmapada* in Prakrit, and the recently published text known as the *Patna Dharmapada*, which is in a language close to Pali." In addition, Max Müller claimed to have knowledge of translations of the Dhammapada, or at any rate of a work that significantly overlaps with the Dhammapada, in Chinese and in Tibetan.

Language and Text. Some of the earliest oral accounts and written deposits of the teachings of Gotama Buddha were in Sanskrit, but the language of the Dhammapada, as well as of all the other works in the canon of Theravāda Buddhism, is Pali, which bears a strong linguistic connection to Sanskrit and Vedic (see chapter 5). The various vernacular languages seemed to Gotama himself to be preferable to Sanskrit, the language of the scholars and sages. Nevertheless, Pali itself eventually became a scholar's language, and it is studied today by those, in East or West, who want to understand the Buddhist tradition in its oldest written form. The Pali Dhammapada came into being in Sri Lanka, into which Buddhism spread in the third century B.C.E., first in the form of the oral tradition; and from Sri Lanka, eventually in written form, the Dhammapada was carried to most of Southeast Asia, where it is revered and studied to this day. Having been originated and transmitted orally, the text of the Dhammapada has repeatedly proved baffling to its editors and translators. The production of the first

edition of the original Pali text in accordance with critical philological standards, based on three Pali manuscripts with a Latin translation, was the work of a Danish scholar, V. Fausbøll, in 1855; a second edition appeared in 1900. Max Müller pays it the compliment of declaring that "there was no other scholar living at the time who would have ventured on such new ground as that chosen by the young Danish scholar." Philological work on the Dhammapada has continued since Fausbøll's edition. Nevertheless, for a number of passages in the present edition, the translators, having consulted all the available materials, have been obliged to confess that "even the combined benefit of the study of these sources could not always give us the enlightenment that we would have desired on some intricacies of our text and its commentary. In some cases at least, this could conceivably be due to 'corruption' in the process of transmission of the text in Sri Lanka." Even after all their research, moreover, they have found that "too many problems remain, and indeed some of the problems connected with the text are likely to remain unsolved, though it is to be hoped that future research may reduce their number."

Canon and Authority. Nowhere in these *Sacred Writings* is the problem of canon and authority more acute and more complicated than in the study of Buddhism. Just as Judaism and the major confessional divisions of Christianity are defined in part by the disagreements about which books should and should not be included in the biblical canon (see chapters 1 and 2), so the three divisions of Buddhism—Theravāda ("Way of the Elders") or Hīnayāna ("Lesser Vehicle"), Mahāyāna ("Greater Vehicle"), and Mantrayāna or Vajrayāna—have divergent canons. The sheer mass of the total Buddhist corpus of Sacred Books, even in the Hīnayāna Pali canon alone, is overwhelming. The Pali canon comprises thirty-two books in all, collected in "the Three Baskets" or Tipitaka: the Vinaya-Pitaka, "Basket of Discipline," which is a compilation intended chiefly or even exclusively for Buddhist monks; the Sutta-Pitaka, "Basket of

Discourses," in which Buddhist doctrine is expounded in the form of discourses by the Buddha; and the Abhidhamma-Pitaka, a title translated by some Western students as "Basket of Scholasticism," which deals with questions of metaphysics. The Dhammapada belongs to the second of the Three Baskets and holds a position of honor within Buddhist spirituality. More than most of the other books in the Pali canon or in the canons of the other Buddhist groups, it can lay claim to an "ecumenical" authority, which was, indeed, one of the most important considerations in its being chosen for inclusion here; for in content if not in form, the maxims and precepts it attributes to the teachings of Gotama Buddha are, by and large, the common property of all those who profess to be his disciples.

Traditional Interpretation. The text of the present edition of the Dhammapada, unlike that of the other Sacred Books in this set, includes as an integral part of the work an early quasi-canonical commentary, as well as a transliteration of the Pali text of the Dhammapada. The reason for including the commentary is its wealth of indispensable explanatory glosses on words and concepts of the Dhammapada that might otherwise be totally obscure. It was on that basis that Carter and Palihawadana decided "to combine the translation of the verses of the *Dhammapada* with the expository text that immediately follows them in the traditional commentary (which is now extant only in the Pali translation made of it some time after the fifth century A.D.), and to supplement this with notes drawn from some of the major interpretive works on the *Dhammapada* written in Sri Lanka." Within the tradition of Western scholarly interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures, the Dhammapada has likewise come to occupy an important place because of its relative transparency and accessibility.

Translations and This Translation. The history of the successive translations of the Dhammapada into Western languages is an epitome of the gradual discovery of Buddhism by scholars and thinkers.

Fausbøll's Latin translation, followed by Max Müller's English translation, opened the work to Western readers. The Pali Text Society, as part of its series of "Sacred Books of the Buddhists," published the Dhammapada in 1931. Because of his eminence as a philosopher-statesman and as the author of the widely influential *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (2d ed., 1940), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's edition of the Pali text and English translation with notes, published in 1950, has been warmly received. The translation we are presenting here, the joint labor of John Ross Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana, is the result of a special, if not quite unique, collaboration between Eastern and Western scholarship and, as they put it, of a "long-distance correspondence between Hamilton, New York, and Maharagama, Sri Lanka."

II

METHODS OF STUDY

7

THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Religion has been defined, in the celebrated formulation of the American philosopher William James, as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine"; another Harvard professor, Alfred North Whitehead, defined it as "what the individual does with his own solitariness." Now it is a teaching shared by many religions and urged by many sacred books that "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21 AV), even though there have also been some religions—including, according to many historians, the official religion of ancient Rome—that have stressed outward observance almost to the exclusion of private spirituality. As we shall have occasion to note more than once, the practice of private devotion, and of mystical contemplation, does act as an important resource for reading and understanding any sacred book. Nevertheless, just as it is at best one-sided and at worst distorted to define religion exclusively on the basis of the solitary individual, so it is, if anything, even more important for the understanding of the

Sacred Book than it is for mystical devotion to locate it within the community of faith and its tradition.

The reason for this importance is that in each case it is the community of faith that has written the Sacred Book or, at the very least, has acknowledged the Book as sacred. And, looking at the question from the opposite direction, it is by means of the Sacred Book, or sometimes by means of a particular interpretation of the Sacred Book, that the community of faith has defined itself. "The People of the Book" is a Muslim term, used in the Qur'ān (e.g., 3:64–66) and applied now to the three "book monotheisms" claiming Abraham as their father: following the usual Muslim order, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. But by extension the name may legitimately be applied to any sacred community that lives by a sacred book. To begin with, the Sacred Book is often the emblem by which a community of faith sets itself apart—or, in the literal etymology of the word, "de-fines" itself, by fixing the boundaries—in relation to other communities. Rudyard Kipling's phrase "lesser breeds without the Law" was surely Eurocentric and probably racist, but it was only his version of such de-fining on the basis of "the Law" that "we" have and "they" presumably do not. That self-definition of the community has, in both subtle and overt ways, affected the Sacred Book itself, helping to determine what should be in and what should be out, and a judicious reader of the Book will be on the lookout for evidence of this process as part of the key to understanding.

For the Sacred Book is a key to the history of the people, and the history of the people is a key to the Sacred Book. This mutuality implies that the sacred history the Book narrates and the sacred history the people of the Book have experienced interpenetrate each other at all levels. Even in phrases and stories of the Sacred Book that do not refer to the history outright, the history continues to be present, so that ignoring it can lead to grave misunderstanding. When we as readers of a sacred book come upon the use of the singular

somewhere—for example, the name "Adam" in the Tanakh, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān—that does not necessarily imply that reference is to an individual apart from the community. Indeed, it may often imply the very opposite, that the community itself—in the case of Adam, the community of the entire human race—is speaking. In other instances it implies that the individual is functioning here as a representative and spokesman for the community, or as a representative and spokesman of the Holy toward the community, perhaps even against it. Sometimes, as in the case of the Tanakh, the communal history covered by the Sacred Book itself extends over several millennia, and sometimes, as in the case of the New Testament, it is no more than a century or so. Trying to identify the locus of an incident or a saying within the history will often help to give it meaning. The very figures of speech in which a people of the Book will strive to come to terms with some later event spring to mind almost unconsciously from the sacred page: an indelible example from our own time is Holocaust, the term used in the Septuagint Greek translation of such passages as Leviticus 6 in the Tanakh for what our version calls "the ritual of the burnt offering."

A people of the Book may or may not think of itself as unique, but it cannot evade—and neither can the present-day reader of the Book—the question of its relation as a community of faith and observance to other communities. Much of what a sacred book describes or prescribes, for example, pertains to a much smaller community than the people as a whole, notably to the family. The home is the place where many first encounter the Sacred Book, as part of growing up and as an accompaniment to the rites of passage through life, from birth to schooling to marriage to the grave. Even readers who are not attempting to conform their lives to the standards set down in the Sacred Book should always be attentive to the communities and sub-communities to which and for which it speaks. Conversely, because of the role of the Sacred Book in identifying the people of the Book, there is always a

political dimension present, even when it is not overt. The story of Moses standing before Pharaoh, demanding in the name of the Lord "Let my people go!" (Ex. 9:1) may apply, by metaphor or allegory, to the liberation of the individual soul from the bonds of sin or from a demonic addiction; it *must* apply to the deliverance of an entire people from bondage, whether by the Exodus or by the Emancipation Proclamation. The history of religious-political fanaticism and of the idea of "holy war" in our own time has demonstrated yet again that the theocratic ideal of an equation of the political entity (or, in modern terms, the state) with the people of the Book is always a possibility—and often a danger. How the natural ties of family or ethnicity fit in with the definition of the people of the Book is an issue that the reader of a sacred book must continually recognize, as Abraham Lincoln did when he spoke of the United States as "the almost chosen people."

Closely related to this political dimension, but distinct enough to warrant special mention as a key for reading a sacred book, is the place of legislation within its covers, to which we shall return in a later chapter. The very name Torah, which originally means simply "teaching," has come to acquire the specific meaning "law," and each of the six Sacred Books in this set contains some rules and regulations. Some of these are very individualistic and strictly "private," dealing with some of the most intimate of human experiences. Yet even these belong to the ground rules by which the community as people of the Book orders the common life, as the regulations governing the ritual bath and circumcision show. Whenever one reads a sacred book belonging to another tradition, one is inevitably struck by minute prohibitions or prescriptions that to an outsider must seem quite esoteric or even trivial. Indeed, when one returns to portions of one's own Sacred Book after some interval, there are always exotic details about proper clothing or ritual purification that do not seem to have been there before, and their purpose, for heaven or even for earth, seems utterly impenetrable. Yet even for interpreting these, the social

setting of private rules and sayings within the sacred community can be a useful key. That applies all the more, it seems, to the legislation of the Book for the people as a whole. As we shall have opportunity to note again later, virtually every religion has feasts and fasts and festivals, sacred times and sacred places, that are set aside for the Holy. Regulating these, standardizing their observance without stifling the creative urges of individual piety, and keeping potentially dangerous extravagances within bounds is the function of the religious jurisprudence by which the Sacred Book helps to give the people of the Book its historical identity.

That identity, moreover, is not exhausted by the history that is contained in the Book, and an essential focus for understanding the Book and its people is holy tradition. Both by explicit cross-references and by tacit acknowledgments, the Sacred Book points back to the tradition out of which it has come. These cross-references and tacit acknowledgments are not always easy to pick up, but an alert reader can sometimes tease them out of the text by constantly pondering what kinds of collective experience and tradition seem to underlie it: does the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 mean that there was a Near Eastern tradition of child sacrifice with which Israel had to deal? Are the recitations of the story of the Exodus from Egypt part of a liturgical tradition, an annual ritual of "owning the Covenant," even though the materials in the Torah on the Passover observance fail to include this and other features that have been incorporated into the later observance of the commemoration of the Exodus, as this is prescribed in the ceremonies of the Haggadah? Sometimes the reason that some part of an earlier tradition has not been included in the Sacred Book is itself an interesting speculative question, although the historical resources for answering that question may be extremely limited. Such limitations have, to be sure, never kept students of Sacred Books from either asking or answering such questions. In many cases, earlier traditions that were not included in the Sacred Book, for

whatever reason, have nevertheless persisted and have become parts of the "postbiblical" tradition, even though they are actually "prebiblical" in their origins.

And "postbiblical" often, though not always, may also mean less authoritative. Thus in every people of the Book there is some version of the debate between the primal authority of the sacred text and the later authority of the accumulated—and still accumulating—tradition. The reformers who have arisen within the peoples of the Book may sometimes lay claim to a new insight or revelation that supersedes the older ones, including those in the Sacred Book itself, but more often such new insight presents itself in the form of a deeper understanding intended by the holy writer or by the Holy that was the writer's inspiration. There is tradition in every religion, in fact in every society whether primitive or modern, but it is characteristic of religions of the Book that the tradition is in many fundamental ways a tradition of exegesis. If a reader, whether a member of that people of the Book or not, wants to read and understand the Sacred Book, it is presumptuous to act as though no one had ever read or understood it before. This resource is distinct, though not completely separate, from the critical scholarly traditions that also adhere to the text, but simple courtesy as well as historical sensitivity would seem to require that before I pull rabbits out of a hat on my own or learn the most recent theories of some professor somewhere, I should try to see the Sacred Book in the life and history of its own people, giving them the first voice to which I listen. Gilbert K. Chesterton once defined tradition as "extending the franchise to our ancestors," and this would seem to be the right way to treat other people's ancestors, too, when we study a sacred book that belongs to them.

There is one important respect in which no reader inside or outside the community can forget that the Sacred Book does belong to the people of the Book past and present, and that is in the determination of the very table of contents of the Book. In the case of a sacred book the

usual term for table of contents is "canon," which means "norm"; each of the six introductory chapters here includes a paragraph under that title. What I hold in my hand when I pick up each of these Sacred Books is the result of a process by which someone back there somewhere decided that this particular collection of writings would constitute the norm or rule for believing, living, and praying, hence the "canon." The fecundity of religious experience in spawning hymns and poems, affirmations and doxologies, is notorious, and so is the propensity of religious establishments for censoring those expressions deemed to be aberrations, while elevating to canonical status those that seem to merit such a status. Thus a short time after the death of Gotama Buddha, a council was held at Rajagaha which began the process of fixing the "Pali Canon" of Buddhist Scripture (see chapter 6); and at Jamnia, some time after the Roman sack of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., there was, according to some scholars, a Jewish council to discuss the canonicity of certain books. Even those Sacred Books that have resulted from a single set of experiences and revelations, like the ones that came to the Prophet Muhammad to form the Qur'ān, have not completely escaped the controversy over canon. But such controversy has been particularly virulent in those groups where the question of canon has arisen after the fact, when the accumulations of the centuries do finally have to be sorted out by separating the authentic from the inauthentic or the less authentic, the wheat from the chaff. Such a process of sorting, and by whatever criteria, may take a long time, and even after such a time it is often anything but final. In principle the ideal may be a single norm, but historically the norms—and the canons of the Sacred Book—are pluralistic.

All along I have been using the term "people of the Book" in the singular, as though there were one people for each Book and one Book for each people, when in fact the same Sacred Book, in whole or in part, may carry normative force for more than one people—and "one people" may not really be one at all. For a force that claims to unite

humanity with God and thus in God to unite humanity itself, religion has displayed an astonishing capacity to divide not only the adherents of one faith from the adherents of another but some adherents of one faith from other adherents of the same faith—and thus some readers of a sacred book from other readers of the same sacred book. It would not be fair to inflict on every reader of every Sacred Book a catalog of the schisms, sects, and controversies that have come from encounters with the same normative Book. But endless confusion can result, even at a purely external level, if a reader does not realize, for example, that the Qur'ān and the Rig Veda have been arranged differently in different versions, that different groups count the Psalms differently, and that even the Ten Commandments are not numbered the same way in all denominations. Far graver are the consequences of sectarianism and schism over the basic meaning of the Sacred Book itself. To call the Tanakh by its Christian designation "the Old Testament" is, without even having to say it, to posit the existence of a Testament that is "New," which continues/supplements/supersedes the Old. Even a reader who is determined to travel light and to avoid excess baggage does have to carry some of this information about what by this time we should probably be calling "the peoples of the Books."

8

THE COMMUNITY OF SCRIBES AND SCHOLARS

It seems safe to guess that during the past two or three centuries more scholars have lavished more care on these Sacred Books than on any comparable number of words and pages in the world—on some, to be sure, more than on others, and probably more on the New Testament than on all the others combined, but also in amazing detail on each of these Sacred Books. As a result, if an unsuspecting reader of these *Sacred Writings* decides to drop into the local library just to check out a few titles, the result will be a deluge of catalog entries: critical editions of the original text and annotated translations into various languages, scholarly monographs and learned journals, proceedings of international conferences and countless Ph.D. dissertations, all with no end in sight. The only possible response is the sigh of King Solomon, "The making of many books is without limit, and much study is a wearying of the flesh" (Eccles. 12:12)—or perhaps the classic thank-you letter of the child, "Dear Auntie, The book told me more about penguins than I ever wanted to know!" For thousands of years and in many religions and cultures, the spectacle of quarrels among the learned over minutiae

of the text while the people are starving for spiritual food has been a recurring theme for reformers and satirists, and with good reason. When, as has periodically been the case and especially during recent centuries, the scholars have at the same time been neutral or even hostile to the text and the tradition, seemingly employing the methods of critical research to undermine the faith, the negative reaction to their work sounds a correspondingly polemical note.

Therefore the first observation to be made about the scholarly study of the Sacred Books is the reminder that by no means have all of the scholars who worked on them been hostile. In fact, the hostile modern scholars would not have had texts to study and criticize if there had not been devout and patient scribes and grammarians over many centuries who faithfully transmitted the sacred text to later generations. While it simply is not true, as is often said these days in the heat of debate, that it is impossible for an outsider to understand Christian or Jewish or Buddhist (or black or female or, for that matter, Slavic) writings or that only a believer has the right to explain a sacred book—a position that would make Egyptian hieroglyphics, Homeric religion, or Druidism totally inaccessible to anyone today—it is true that the believing scholars of past and present always have much to contribute to our understanding of a sacred book. In the case of some of these Sacred Books, for example the Qur'ān or the Rig Veda, the research of Western scholars from outside the community of faith—some of them now being reprinted in the lands, such as Egypt and India, where these Sacred Books are normative—has acted in modern times as a catalyst to stimulate the historical and philological work of those scholars who adhere to this Sacred Book as a standard for life and faith. Increasingly, moreover, the publications of such scholars from Asia and Africa are appearing in English and other Western languages, adding to the card catalogs but also to the clarification of the Sacred Books. For such scholarship, too, the Sacred Book is not merely something out of a museum, but part of the total culture of a people of the Book, to be

studied with the same affectionate feeling and close attention that one gives to a letter from one's beloved, for to the eyes of faith that is really what it is.

Even those readers within a community of faith will have to acknowledge, however, the massive contribution that has come to the understanding of their Sacred Book above all from the critical historical and literary scholarship of investigators who are not by any definition orthodox believers. Despite a grateful recognition of the patient work of the scribes in the various scriptoria East and West in passing on the sacred manuscripts, no one can be blind to the massive textual problems that still remain in each of these Sacred Books. There are obvious misspellings or mistakes, made many centuries and many manuscripts ago and perpetuated precisely because the scribes have been so faithful. Where the scribes had to choose from among the variant readings they encountered, they were often naive and sometimes arbitrary, mechanically counting manuscripts pro and con even when most of the manuscripts were derived from one manuscript and should therefore have been counted together for only one vote. Textual criticism, whether applied to a sacred book or to the folios of Shakespeare, remains something less than an exact science, but it is a science as well as an art and it can go a long way toward determining the degrees of probability for different readings. It should perhaps be added that the textual criticism of the folios of Shakespeare or of the manuscripts of James Joyce proceeds in considerable measure by the methods and rules modern scholars of Sacred Books have worked out. Discriminating readers will want to be thankfully aware that the renderings of the texts of the Sacred Books included in this set reflect the application of that art and science of textual criticism, and it is a tribute to the increasing sophistication of such readers, as well as to that of translators, editors, and publishers, that recent editions of various Sacred Books have been incorporating information about this so-called "lower criticism" in their footnotes and critical apparatus.

Unavoidably, such scholarly information is often rather arcane, and there are some who find it disturbing to know that the sacred text may not be absolutely reliable in every letter. But the importance of textual criticism as a tool for reading the Sacred Books is more than equaled—and its capacity to disturb is exceeded—by the "higher criticism" of Sacred Books, which deals with such questions as authorship. As each of our introductory chapters has suggested, the derivation of Sacred Books from tradition implies that the process of reducing the tradition to its final written form may have taken considerable time and may have involved multiple sources. The eighteenth century saw the rise of the "documentary hypothesis" as a method of literary history, applicable to the poems of Homer (whoever he or they may have been) as well as to Sacred Books, with somewhat similar results in the identification of such supposed sources. Although the study of Homer no less than the study of Sacred Books during the twentieth century has come to place greater emphasis on the oral transmission of the materials that eventually became the text, rather than on alleged written documents that were stitched together by some unknown redactor, one underlying scholarly presupposition remains the same: in studying a sacred book, whether one's own or someone else's, it is appropriate and justifiable to apply the same methods of historical-literary analysis that students of other, less hallowed ancient texts employ. The outcome of such analysis, however, is often at variance with the received views within the community of faith about the composition of the book. A reader will want to learn at least something about current scholarly theories of the authorship and origin of a sacred book, but should also learn how to take the book as it stands, whatever its historical or prehistorical development may have been, and to read it as an artifact in its own right. For it is characteristic of every Sacred Book that it speaks with an immediacy and directness over which—as even a scholar is sometimes tempted to say, "Thank God!"—the scholars have little control.

Almost certainly the most valuable contribution of scholarship to the general reader is in the study of the immediate historical context of these Sacred Books. It is part of the "paradox of understanding" discussed earlier that the work of the historical scholars on this context has illumined the world of thought reflected in the Sacred Book and at the same time has made it even stranger than it was before. A twentieth-century Western mind trying to encompass the Analects of Confucius can derive great benefit from the sympathetic and learned treatment by Benjamin Schwartz in his book *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. Many of the individual sayings in the Analects, but also the style of teaching and learning that the Analects presuppose, become far clearer than they would be if one simply picked up the book cold and started to read it. At the same time, unfortunately, some passages in each of these Sacred Books that seem, at least in some translations, to speak directly to the needs and state of mind of any serious person become more obscure intellectually—and, at least at first, less accessible religiously—in the light of the historical context: the saying of Jesus, "Whoever endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 10:22), does not really mean, as countless sermons have suggested, that the relation of the individual with God is "till death do us part," but, as the context shows, that this world is about to come to an end. Yet there is no justification for a Luddite reaction to historical scholarship, even from readers with a propensity for the allegorical interpretation of a sacred book. It is a long-established principle of allegory that although the literal meaning of the text may be misleading, it remains the most reliable place to start; for us in the twentieth century the literal meaning of any text must be the one that comes not only from grammatical or literary analysis, but also from historical research.

It is chiefly from the study of the historical context of Sacred Books that we learn to understand in depth the variety of literary forms present in them—an issue to which we shall return later. As attention to those literary forms indicates, a major resource for the scholarly

study of Sacred Books has been the comparative method. It is often a corollary of religious loyalty to believe in the distinctiveness, indeed the uniqueness, of "our" Sacred Book, and to dismiss as relativism—or as heresy or blasphemy—any effort to find analogies and parallels for it in any other Sacred Books. But when such parallels truly are too obvious to be dismissed, the alternative strategy is to attribute originality to ours and plagiarism to theirs, even when the chronological facts make this extremely implausible. Despite such defensiveness, however, the comparative method of scholars during the past century or two has been overwhelmingly positive in its results. When the dazzling visions and the transcendent message of the angel Gabriel to Muhammad take their place among the revelations to other prophets in other traditions—with at least some of whom, such as Moses and Jesus, the Prophet Muhammad proudly claimed affinity in the very pages of the Qur'ān (7:103–62, 3:45–59)—they are illumined in various ways. To the predominantly literary preoccupations of earlier comparativists more recent scholars have added insights from anthropology, folklore, and even psychoanalysis, with results that may often have been controversial and may sometimes have been silly, but that have also sometimes provoked many readers of Sacred Books to look at familiar materials from a fresh perspective. It is only necessary to mention Mircea Eliade's application of ideas from anthropology and from Jungian psychology to the myths of creation in various religions to suggest the riches of insight that such comparative-historical scholarship brings to any reader of Sacred Books, believer or not.

But once we have enlarged the community of scholars to include not merely scribes, exegetes, talmudists, theologians, and philosophers, but literary scholars, cultural historians, and social scientists, we are no longer within the circle of faith, and we are obliged to admit that readers of Sacred Books have much to learn from such "secular" scholars. It says a great deal about the realities of religious faith and religious prejudice that almost all readers would be prepared to admit

that about all other Sacred Books than their own! Yet it is the all but universal testimony of representative believers from each of the six traditions represented here in *Sacred Writings* that they have come away from their study of the works of comparative scholars deepened and strengthened in their understanding and appreciation of their own Sacred Book, even as those scholars have likewise helped them to make the acquaintance of other Sacred Books they had thought of as utterly alien. This is an experience we hope may be duplicated also by some of the readers of these *Sacred Writings*.

9

THE SACRED LANGUAGE

Although most readers of this set will come to it with English as their first language, or even as their only language, they need to realize the obvious and yet not so obvious fact that all six of these Sacred Books are translations from some ancient original language: in order of appearance, Hebrew (plus a little Aramaic), Greek, Arabic, Chinese, Sanskrit, and Pali. "Translators are traitors," an Italian proverb says, confirming the disappointment that is experienced over and over by native speakers of any language whenever the rendering of a work into a second language fails to do justice to the original—as, by definition, it always does. There is much to be said in favor of the nineteenth-century Romantic notion that a nation's language is the one indispensable key to its authentic genius and to the spirit of its deepest traditions. "The German language," wrote the poet Friedrich Klopstock, "is the way we once were: unique." Even people who are ignorant of other languages, as speakers of English all too often tend to be, ought to recognize that only a rank beginner in the study of another language, and only an extremely naive reader of any translation, will suppose

that there is some sort of one-to-one equivalency between any two languages, as though the same term in Sanskrit or Hebrew (or Russian or Japanese) could always be uniformly Englished. The history of international diplomacy is replete with anecdotes about misunderstandings, which would be funny if they were not so serious, that have been generated by somebody's failure to grasp the intended nuance in a communication between governments, simply because the translation could not, or at any rate did not, do it justice. Less grave and therefore more comic are the many stories about how immigrants, and even the children and grandchildren of immigrants, missed the insulting or vulgar overtones of a word or phrase when they were thinking in one language but speaking or writing in another. For it is, as often as not, the connotations of an idiomatic expression in one language that fail to find their way into the other. That problem afflicts even the supposedly objective languages of science and engineering or of international finance, as we are beginning to learn now that the whole world is becoming a single market.

Nor is the difficulty of achieving fidelity in a translation simply a function of knowing the vocabulary and finding the right words. Even between languages that belong to the same family, there are deep and subtle differences in syntax. The differences are deeper and subtler between languages that stand in a completely alien tradition, which for speakers of English is the case with all the languages in which these Sacred Books were originally written, except, in a remote way, Sanskrit and Greek. Arabic and Hebrew, for example, will frequently dispense with forms of the verb "to be" where English and other Western languages seem to require one: "This *is* the day that the Lord has made" (Ps. 118:24). But sometimes it is "to signify" rather than "to be" that the text implies rather than says, as when Joseph tells Pharaoh, "'The seven healthy cows *are* seven years" (Gen. 41:26). Even between English and Greek, which is the closest to English of all the languages represented here, a reader should be aware of these subtle but profound

differences of syntax. It would be highly intrusive for the translators of any of these Sacred Books to call attention each time to instances of such modulation of key across languages, but "truth in packaging" would seem to require that readers who cannot check the original receive the warning that something like this has been going on.

All these problems of translating are compounded when the original is poetry. Should opera be sung in the original, as it usually is in the United States, or in the language of the audience, as it often is in Europe? In part the answer to that question is rooted in this general problem. "It is a pretty poem, Mr. Pope," Richard Bentley said when Alexander Pope published his version of the *Iliad* in 1715, "but you must not call it Homer!" And it was not Homer, but at least it was a "pretty poem," and that is rather more than can be said for some English versions of Greek epic, which are so pedantic and two-dimensional that the English reader cannot get any understanding from them at all of why these epics have been gripping the human heart for more than twenty-five centuries. Among poems, moreover, it is above all lyric poetry that makes translators into traitors: the compact form of the lyric does not leave room for translators to establish a pattern or to find their voice, because by the time they have begun to do so the poem is over. Americans and West Europeans always have great difficulty understanding why so many Russians put Pushkin in the first place among authors in their language, above even Dostoevsky and Tolstoy; this discrepancy, while complex in its origins, appears to be due at least in part to the difficulty of finding a voice in English for the poetry of Pushkin. Yet the qualitative difference between prose and poetry as a subject for translation becomes infinitely more complicated still when a translator undertakes, as have the various scholars and authors whose work has gone into this set, to carry over into another language and another culture the deepest expressions of the spirituality of a people as it is documented in its

Sacred Books. Anyone who has ever attempted it, even as a student exercise, will confess to having known their anguish firsthand.

That situation makes it understandable when the devotees of some Sacred Books have despaired of the effort, arguing that if the Holy has chosen to reveal Itself through the medium of a particular language, it is incumbent upon the faithful to learn that language in order to read that Sacred Book. The most fully articulated enshrinement of the sacred language as the indispensable key to the Sacred Book is probably the Muslim reverence for Arabic as the original language of the Qur'ān. The distinguished modern Muslim scholar Muhammad Abduh speaks of how "foreign converts to Islam came to appreciate the imperative need to retain the integrity of the Arabic language." Statistically, the number of non-Arabic Muslims in a world Islamic population of about a billion is greater than that of Arab adherents, for whom the sacred language is a native tongue, or at any rate the ancestor of their native tongue. In Iran or Pakistan or Kazakhstan, the close connection between the Qur'ān and its original language has often been a hardship for those who aspire to deeper knowledge of the faith or to a clerical career. Nevertheless, our translation of the Qur'ān by the Pakistani poet Ahmed Ali is evidence of how profoundly and sensitively a non-Arab is able to grasp the sacred text and, having grasped it, to render it into an altogether different tongue, indeed into a tongue that is also different from his own native language (which is Urdu).

This bilingual edition of his translation of the Qur'ān also illustrates one of the most splendid by-products that can come from the reverence for the original language. Combined as it is with the resistance to any idolatry, such reverence led Islamic culture to a cultivation of the art of writing the sacred tongue of the Qur'ān in a calligraphy that has only rarely been matched in the history of human literacy. Although the Qur'ān is a special case of the primacy of the sacred language for

the understanding of the Sacred Book, it is by no means the only example. Our edition of the Dhammapada not only translates the Pali text, but transliterates it. The translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek by the Hellenistic Jews of Alexandria from the third to the first centuries B.C.E., the so-called Septuagint, was used by Christians for their own purposes in such a way that dissuaded the adherents of Judaism from the very idea of translating the Torah again. It rendered the Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14, translated "young woman" in our version of the Tanakh, with "virgin," which the New Testament was able to quote in support of Christian teaching (Matt. 1:22–23). Therefore when the dominant literary language of parts of the Mediterranean world became Latin once more in the third and fourth centuries C.E., it was the Christians through the Vulgate, not the Jews through a Latin translation of the Tanakh, who made the Bible known to the Gentiles. Similarly, the translations of the Buddhist Sacred Books into Chinese are still regarded with admiration by scholars of both Buddhism and Chinese, who also, however, point to the subtle but profound differences that took place in Buddhist doctrine as a consequence. In the words of a distinguished scholar of Chinese Buddhism, Arthur Wright, "Everyone who has contemplated the process by which Indian ideas and institutions were made intelligible and, to a degree, acceptable to the Chinese has been struck by the breadth of the cultural gulf which had to be overcome."

Formidable as these attendant difficulties undoubtedly are, they have, obviously, not managed to deter translators from the attempt to make Sacred Books speak in other tongues, as the six volumes of this set demonstrate. Because of the inner impulse to share the faith with others, which believers belonging to many traditions accept as a divine imperative, there has certainly been more translating of Sacred Books—and over a longer period of time—than of any other writings in the whole history of literature. It is to this enterprise of translation that many peoples have owed the first reduction of their vernacular

languages to written form and hence also the very creation of their alphabet, as when Cyril and Methodius came to the Slavs in the ninth century. That process has been continuing throughout the world even during the twentieth century, chiefly through the work of Christian missionaries. The reader of any Sacred Book must also keep in mind the widespread propensity of religious faith for identifying archaic language, sometimes even the archaic language of an early translation, as the sacred language. The story of the pious soul who believed that the most sacred word in the English language was (spoken slowly) "Me-so-po-ta-mi-a" may be a fiction, but the old-fashioned English pronoun "thou" has lived on in the language of love ("How can I leave thee? How can I from thee part?") and in the language of patriotism ("My country, 'tis of thee"), but above all in the language of religious faith, together with the "plain speech" of those groups such as the Society of Friends who pattern their English usage after it. No one speaks the classical Arabic of the Qur'ān today, and Sanskrit is studied only by those who want to understand the Sacred Books of Hinduism and by those scholars in linguistics who want to examine the historic roots of modern Indo-European languages. In the period of the New Testament, the Hebrew of the Tanakh had fallen into disuse among Jews even in Palestine, and Jesus and his disciples spoke Aramaic; it was only in modern times that Hebrew was revived, becoming the vernacular of the state of Israel. The Authorized ("King James") Version of the Bible and the plays of Shakespeare have immortalized Elizabethan English for succeeding generations. Thus the very quaintness of the forms of speech in a sacred book, whether in the original or in a classic translation, somehow seems to lend enchantment and to evoke reverence, and resistance to changes in those forms of speech has often provoked controversy, and even schism, down to the twentieth century.

It is not simply an easy way out of the dilemma of the translator as traitor when each of the translations included here sometimes resorts

to transliterating or adapting certain terms and titles from the sacred language instead of attempting to find or to coin an English equivalent. "Analects" is such an equivalent, and "Bible" is a Graeco-Latin word (originally meaning "books," in the plural) for the Hebrew collection of Sacred Books. But the Hebrew "Tanakh," and above all the Arabic "Qur'ān" and the Sanskrit "Veda" now have a rightful place in English and other languages, for which "The Recitation" or "The Knowledge" would not be an acceptable substitute. Every faith and every Sacred Book would seem to have a right to a certain number of such sacred loan words. Once they have come into the new language as part of a translation, these words may eventually find a permanent home, so that we can speak of "Nirvana" (rendered as "Nibbāna" in the translation of the Dhammapada by John Ross Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana being used here) or "Sabbath" almost as common nouns to be spelled with lower-case initials and to be applied to secular life, and can say "Amen" at the end of a petition regardless of the name of the deity—if any—to whom that petition is addressed. There is a fine line between abdicating the translator's responsibility by dotting the page with one transliterated loan word after another, until the poor reader has to know the original to understand the translation, and laying violent Eurocentric hands on an ancient and venerable text by superimposing Judaeo-Christian vocabulary on it, as has often been done, for example, even in the translations of Plato into English and other modern European languages. The learned may quarrel with the translations in this set for having crossed that fine line in one direction or the other or both, but there seems to be a consensus among most fair-minded critics that each of the translations has struck a reasonable balance between the extremes.

At a time when the realities of transportation, communication, and commerce are bringing the peoples of the world into ever closer contact, if not into ever closer harmony, it may be permissible to express the hope that the need to understand the spirituality of others

will provide some added incentive for the increased study of foreign languages, ancient as well as modern, including the original Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, Chinese, Sanskrit, and Pali of these six Sacred Books. For there is a sense in which it is true that if a translation is to achieve its purpose, it must at one and the same time be clear enough in its renderings to convey the content of the original and be unclear enough to remind the reader that it is not the original; that, too, belongs to the paradox of understanding. Therefore the reader ought to keep in mind that when Confucius in the Analects speaks of "Heaven" or Muhammad in the Qur'ān of "Allah," this is—and yet it is not—what a Western reader with a Jewish or Christian background may mean by "God," and that this paradox, too, is an expression of the Ultimate Mystery for which none of these names is sufficient. As believers of all traditions have acknowledged, we use such names not in order to say something specific about the real nature of the Holy, but in order not to have to remain altogether silent.

10

THE FOUNDER-SAGE

The conviction that there is no God except Allah and that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah is the fundamental creed of the Islamic faith and the central message of its Sacred Book, the Qur'ān. Not every religion has such a "founder," whether historical or mythical, and ultimately every religion claims to have been founded by none other than the Holy Itself. Yet it is a special characteristic of those religions that do have a sacred book that many of them look to the authority of some historical person to whom and through whom the Holy has spoken and acted in a decisive fashion. Indeed, of the six world religions represented in this set of *Sacred Writings*, only the Hinduism of the Rig Veda can be called an exception to this characteristic; for Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Confucius, and Gotama are all acknowledged by their followers as—at the very least—founders, sages, and prophets, both "prophet" and "sage" being unavoidable English translations of highly charged technical terms in the several originals. Because a sacred book purports to contain what the Holy said when It spoke to that person and what It did through that person, and hence what It is

still speaking and still doing among us now, the identity of the founder or sage, howsoever that identity may be understood, is a key to the Sacred Book itself, as the founder comes out to address us from the sacred page.

The reader will usually recognize even without any prompting that in a religion that has a founder and in a sacred book believed to have come directly or indirectly from that founder, it is in the first instance the sayings of the founder-sage that occupy a special place. Some forms of sayings are nearly universal, while others are distinctive to a particular founder and a particular sacred book, and the reader should watch for both kinds. For example, as has been pointed out earlier, the title Analects, which means "miscellaneous selections," is now so specifically associated with the sayings of Confucius, although the word itself is of Greek origin, that we rarely use it in any other context. Yet "analects" would probably be applicable to at least some portions of each of the six volumes in this set. In the mouth of the founder-sage, even a miscellaneous collection of sayings takes on new force and special authority, sometimes because the founder is explicitly setting his sayings into opposition with current interpretations of the tradition and is claiming to have restored the original and authentic intention of the proverb or to have been granted new prophetic insight denied to his predecessors. The universality of the proverbial saying means that the parallels between the sayings of one founder and those of another, some of which are obvious and some of which are not as obvious as they might seem to the superficial observer, make the problems of translation referred to earlier especially acute in rendering such sayings across the boundaries of any two languages. For the key terms that are available to the translator have come out of the linguistic tradition, which is at the same time a religious tradition, of the translator and the readers. Should the translator strive for distinctiveness or for similarity? Part of the answer to that question lies in the attitude of each tradition toward the matter of distinctiveness itself. A

religious commitment to the absolute and total uniqueness of the founder seems to lead to the necessary implication that any borrowings or even parallels are more apparent than real, or at any rate that they have taken place in only one direction. Yet if the founder-sage truly is the mouthpiece of the Holy, should there be anything shocking about the discovery that the founder's insights into the mystery of the Holy and into the meaning of human life reflect, and are reflected in, what other founders at other times and other places have also taught?

Part of the answer to these questions and thus also to the reader's interpretation of the founder's sayings lies in the life and deeds of the founder as the context for his sayings. To the faithful of any tradition, the founder stands not only as the master to be heard and obeyed, but as the model to be followed and imitated. To make sense of the life story of the founder-sage, the reader of a sacred book should learn to recognize the lessons that the authors or compilers of the Sacred Book seek to convey through their accounts of the founder's deeds. Thus the imperative of the Qur'ān "Do not oppress the orphan, and do not drive the beggar away" (93:9–10), an imperative that each of the other Sacred Books in this set echoes in its own way, has its counterpart in the Prophet's own acts of mercy; ultimately, as the superscriptions of the surahs read, it has its origins "in the name of Allah, most benevolent, ever-merciful." Because a persistent theme in the sayings of most founder-sages is the denunciation of hypocrisy—a phenomenon that somehow also seems to possess a universality of its own, cutting across all religious traditions and across the centuries—this correlation between word and deed is an important clue to the reading of the Sacred Book. "Do as I say *and* do as I do!" is what the founder-sage is saying to followers and readers.

Special importance, and for readers in a scientific age special difficulty, attaches to those deeds of various founder-sages that belong to the class of "miracles." For our purposes here it is, fortunately, not necessary to linger over the modern debates about how to define this

problematical concept, except perhaps to stipulate that it does pertain to an action that surpasses or transcends or even contradicts the normal course of nature and in so doing conveys a meaning that at the same time surpasses or transcends or even contradicts the normal course of human knowledge. Such actions in the life of the founder-sage range very widely within and between the Sacred Books, from the early evidence of mental and physical prowess that marks a child prodigy to the manipulation of cosmic forces. Despite the evident interest of many believers in miracles for their own sake as an object of devotion or curiosity or superstition, the readers of any Sacred Book, be they believers or not, are well advised to avoid skipping over them or dismissing them as stunts or even tricks, for they are always more than that: for example, the Greek word "sēmeion," translated "miracle," means "sign-event." Upon encountering such stories about the wondrous deeds of the founder, a sophisticated reader will not ask, or at any rate will not ask only, whether or not this ever really happened. Rather, the question that ought to be uppermost in the mind of the reader should be: what significance attaches to the miracle story as part of the portrait of the founder-sage, and therefore how is it related both to the person of the founder and to the validation of the founder's message for his disciples and for other readers?

Discipleship is, then, another universal aspect of the religious phenomenon of the founder-sage. Even those highly skeptical modern readers who take a conspiratorial view of how religions have been founded and of how Sacred Books have been written find that they have to reckon with the fact of discipleship, if only to try, as Thomas Jefferson did in editing the New Testament, to rescue the founder from his disciples by separating the authentic words of the master from the inauthentic attributions invented by his followers. Sometimes these disciples are anonymous, and sometimes they have acquired an identity of their own. In the Analects of Confucius and in some of the other Sacred Books, as well as in other literature such as the Socratic

dialogues of Plato, the disciple functions as a "straight man" whose questions and responses set up the master to deliver the message and to point the lesson; the disciple can also be a model and a norm of what the appropriate response to the words and deeds of the master ought to be. Yet a disciple is more than a mere reporter, more even than a pupil. For the disciple is one who has heard and accepted the summons of the sage and who has striven toward a life in accordance with that summons, thus establishing a pattern for future disciples. The full scope of discipleship depends partly on how the religion and its Sacred Book define the person of the founder-sage. Readers of the New Testament will recognize the particular significance of this key for the understanding of Christianity, in which the figure of the founder is normatively identified in the creed as "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God," the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. No such metaphysical claims are made for Moses or Muhammad in the strict monotheisms of which they may be called "founders." The modern efforts to find parallels between Jesus Christ and either Confucius or Gotama Buddha, while endlessly fascinating because these figures have also eventually been endowed with a transcendent status, have generally ended in frustration or superficiality or both. In his own distinctive way, however, every one of these founders does lay a summons upon his disciples, and the Sacred Book comes to us from within the charmed circle of those who have accepted that summons.

From this we are to infer that we are confronting in any Sacred Book a special kind of history-telling as it goes on inside that charmed circle, one that is somehow different from ordinary history (whatever *that* may be). As Arthur Waley, our translator of the Confucian Analects, has observed, "Western scholars think it extremely important to discover exactly when people were born and exactly when they died," but such information tends to be of secondary importance for most of the Sacred Books in this set. Even when they do seem to be

supplying chronological information that is intended to be precise, closer examination in the effort to correlate such information with "secular" history often yields results that turn out to be quite frustrating to the modern Western reader; we still cannot be sure just who the Pharaoh of the Exodus was. The source of the frustration lies in a worldview and a literary genre that historians and philosophers of religion generally characterize as "mythological." Contrary to the way this highly loaded term is often used, it does not imply, at least in the first instance, that the history about the founder-sage in the narrative of the Sacred Book did not really happen; for it definitely represents itself to us as "true," perhaps even more "true" than any of the two-dimensional history we read in textbooks and newspapers. But those quotation marks around the word "true" suggest the presence of a third or fourth dimension, without which we will get a distorted view of the sacred story.

No Sacred Book pretends to contain all the deeds and sayings of the founder. As we read a sacred book, therefore, we need to keep asking just why it was that this particular saying or deed was remembered as it was and what its connection may be with those that precede and follow it in the account. For if the account is not strictly chronological, it may nevertheless be logical in some more profound way. The logic of the compilation of sayings need not be that of the Aristotelian syllogism, proceeding from major premise to minor premise to conclusion, but may sometimes move in a lateral or a spiral direction. Thus the saying of Confucius the founder-sage with which the Analects open, "To learn and at due times to repeat what one has learnt, is that not after all a pleasure?" (1:1) becomes a kind of leitmotiv, which subsequent sayings substantiate even when they do not quote it. As the history of later interpretations, whether by believers or by scholars, amply documents, the contrasts or even contradictions between what the founder-sage says at one place and what he says at another provoke confusion, sometimes indeed offense,

but they also provide the opportunity for critical reflection and for ingenious explanation (as, for example, our translator's note to the Qur'ān 4:3 illustrates). Living in an age when the practice of memorizing and reciting the classics is out of fashion in the schools, we may need to be reminded as we read the Sacred Books being presented here that large portions of each of them have been learned by heart and recited from memory. They were oral before they were written, and they went on being oral, perhaps even primarily oral, after they had been written; therefore they are meant to be heard, not merely to be read. That applies above all to the sayings of the founder, which often became the basic textbook material for primary education. In this way they also shape and inform much of the literature that has followed.

11

LITERATURE SACRED AND SECULAR

"Bible" simply means book (or books), "scripture" means writing, and "Qur'ān" means recitation. Every one of these words is used, sometimes even within the covers of the Sacred Books, for other books, writings, and recitations beyond the Book itself. Each of the six Sacred Books in this set, moreover, stands in a series not only with other Sacred Books, as it does here, but with the other books that belong to its own literary and linguistic tradition. Even readers who are firm believers, and especially readers who are not, have much to gain from approaching Sacred Books only as literature. Actually, it is naive to say "only as literature," for even so-called secular literature refuses to be seen that way. Is it really possible for anyone to read *King Lear* or *Oedipus Rex* or *Anna Karenina* "only as literature"? Indeed, the author of the last of those titles had some harsh things to say in his later years about writers, including himself when he wrote *Anna Karenina*, who do not pay sufficient attention to the religious and moral calling of fiction. Because religious faith claims to be a way of understanding and coping with the ultimate issues of life and death, other ways of

doing this will inevitably overlap with it or conflict with it, and among such ways, the various arts—especially music, painting, and literature—have a long association with the sacred. Because literature so often deals with the sacred and because these six Sacred Books are all literature, the literary study of each of them occupies an important and legitimate place not alone in technical scholarship but in the approach of the general reader.

Not only has the translation of a sacred book often been the first monument of a written language, it has often gone on to become a classic and a model. For more than a thousand years throughout Western Europe, Jerome's translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, provided the imagery and vocabulary for lyric and epic, together with the linguistic and literary medium through which historiography, natural science, and sacred rhetoric enriched and shaped the literatures of various lands. For almost twice that long, the entire history of Sanskrit literature was similarly inspired and preoccupied with both the language and the themes of the Vedas, making any distinction between "secular literature" and "sacred literature" practically meaningless there. In the histories of world literature, therefore, a prominent place belongs to these and other Sacred Books, without which neither a native nor an outsider bent on becoming acquainted with the literary tradition can decipher it. The telling and retelling of materials from a sacred book is itself, in each of the groups shaped by these six collections of sacred scripture, a substantial chapter in the history of literature. Above all, the commentaries and paraphrases, such as the commentary on the Dhammapada that appears in our edition of it, constitute a literary form in their own right. But other forms of retelling loom large also as literary works. For readers of English, the best known of these is probably John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which the first three chapters of Genesis from the Tanakh provide a framework for poetic imagination, religious faith, and psychological speculation to present the human condition in a form that can speak also to

those for whom the source of the original story does not have the status of normative Scripture.

Even more relevant to the readers of these *Sacred Writings* as a method is an examination of some of the principal literary genres appearing in the Sacred Books, for such an examination does provide guidance to reading and understanding them. It says something about Sacred Books as a genre, moreover, and it provides some justification for collecting them into a set of this kind, that with some degree of elasticity every one of these literary genres can be recognized in more than one of these Sacred Books, even though it may predominate in only one of them. As they stand, these literary forms often remain undifferentiated in the Sacred Books; but just as it is necessary in an ancient work of history such as *The History of the Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides to read the prose narratives differently from the way we read the speeches, so it is helpful to pay attention to the insights of the scholars into the poetry of Sacred Books, into prophetic utterance, into apocalyptic vision. The sheer amount of anguish that has been caused by controversy over Sacred Books might have been reduced significantly, for example, if it had been clearer to all sides just what the literary form of creation narratives is. The opening chapters of the Tanakh are not intended to provide a scientific explanation for the origin of things, but to affirm that God is the creator of the universe regardless of how it may have come into being.

Thus something very much like a collection of proverbs is present in the most widely separated cultures, frequently in the form of the traditions of the elders that have been passed down from generation to generation. Scholars have sometimes been able to chart the wanderings of various proverbs from one collection to another, across many religions, languages, and cultures; readers of these Sacred Books may have the same experience. Other sayings acquire distinctive forms, as in the "oracles" of Muhammad or the "parables" of Jesus or the "concrete illustrations" of Confucius. Although a proverb or apo-

thegm will often depend for some of its effectiveness upon turns of language or plays on words virtually impossible to reproduce in a translation—how would one translate into any of the six languages represented here Benjamin Franklin's saying at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately"?—it depends primarily upon its conformity with the widespread and even universal experiences or aspirations of humanity. Despite great diversity precisely on this score, Sacred Books may, and usually do, present themselves as the disclosure of something their hearers and readers did not know before, and thus at least in this respect as an insight into truth or sometimes even as a divine revelation. But even the highest claims to the credentials of revelation and inspiration—represented here probably by the Qur'ān, of which it is said, "We have sent down to you the Book containing the truth" (4:105)—do not prevent a sacred book from making an appeal to universal experiences and aspirations. Western readers of the Confucian Analects have frequently been struck by the appearance there of a proverbial saying, "Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you" (15:23), that closely resembles the Golden Rule attributed to Jesus Christ, "Always treat others as you would like them to treat you" (Matt. 7:12).

A second literary question in the reading of a Sacred Book is how to deal with its laws and rules of conduct. The question of legislation as a social and political force has been discussed in an earlier consideration of the relation between the Sacred Book and its people, but here it is the law as literature that concerns us. Study of the law as literature suggests that although the word "legislator" carries for us today the connotations of a deliberative process of compromise and give-and-take, those connotations are largely absent from the Sacred Books. Indeed, "lawgiver" would be a better title than "legislator" for the person of serene authority who issues these commandments. Related to that authority are the sanctions and promises the lawgiver attaches

to his rules. Sometimes in each of the six Sacred Books these are the eminently this-worldly blessings of health and progeny, prosperity and peace, or the corresponding punishment of their lack. With degrees of specificity and intensity that vary greatly from one religion to another, however, each lawgiver also formulates his demands in a way that gives them some kind of transcendent and other-worldly dimension. Whatever the theological implications of this relation between the this-worldly and the other-worldly dimensions may be, it does affect the literary form of the law codes. As Robert Polzin, author of the chapter about the Book of Deuteronomy in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, has observed, "The effect of the law code's composition, therefore, is to show us that the authoritative status of the Mosaic voice is *almost* indistinguishable from that of the voice of God" (italics his).

Yet another literary form that many Sacred Books either contain or presuppose is history and biography; within their respective national literatures they often are the earliest such narratives to have been recorded. As has been mentioned earlier, this is true preeminently of Sacred Books that trace the origin of their religion to a founder-sage. Therefore any account of a founder-sage will seem to partake of the nature of a biography. By modern standards, of course, such a "biography" will inevitably be disappointing, for some of the most fundamental information that any reader wants will be missing from it: we can, if we care to, learn more about the life story of any professional athlete or rock star of our own time than we can know about any one of the founders represented in these *Sacred Writings*. In studying the hallowed accounts of the Sacred Books, therefore, sensitive readers will constantly ask themselves what they are looking for in the historical narrative. On the other hand, the efforts of archaeologists to correlate their findings with the reports of the Sacred Books have frequently, though not invariably, illumined the history and literature that had been, before the digging, the only surviving relics of that ancient past. In the People's Republic of China, for example, archaeol-

ogy and anthropology sometimes have, without any explicit desire to do anything of the kind, brought dramatic vindication of archaic tradition.

There is special significance to the genre of literature known as philosophy. The word "philosophy" has come to us from Greek, and so has our usual definition of the discipline itself. For the traditions represented by the first three of the Sacred Books in this set—the Tanakh, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān—the interaction between "philosophy" and "theology" has been a major element in the history of ideas. But for the three traditions in the second half of the set—the Analects, the Rig Veda, and the Dhammapada—such a dichotomy between "philosophy" and "theology" is at best artificial and at worst misleading. For despite the efforts mentioned earlier to find parallels to Jesus Christ in either Confucius or Gotama Buddha, the Western figure of whom those sages remind us the most frequently is in fact Socrates. The central character and theme in Fung Yu-Lan's *Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, therefore, is the sage Confucius; a standard work like that of A. B. Keith can carry the title *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*; and two widely read twentieth-century books, A. J. Bahm's *Philosophy of the Buddha* and T. R. V. Murti's *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, speak in the same accents about Gotama Buddha. That should perhaps suggest to secularized Westerners that religious faith and myth have been a more prominent factor also in the history of European philosophy than our textbooks sometimes tell us, as recent studies of Plato or Hegel have shown. Above all, it should be on the mind of anyone who reads the Sacred Books as literature.

Literature is only one of the arts, though obviously the most directly relevant to the study of Sacred Books as books. Ideally, a collection of *Sacred Writings* would be, in the modern vernacular, a "multimedia presentation," in which—keeping to the present order of the books—an elaborately wrought Haggadah, icons of the Virgin Mary, symbolic

decorations of the Blue Mosque, Chinese silk paintings, sculptures of Vishnu, and statues of the Buddha from Southeast Asia, or the musical counterparts to each of these six, would all provide their own commentary on the sacred text. Even without such art works, however, the translations that appear here do at least attempt to capture some of the literary quality of the originals, in some passages more successfully than in others, and thus to inform, but also to inspire, those many readers who may find in aesthetic experience their nearest access to the Holy.

12

SPIRITUALITY AS PRAYER AND ACTION

Despite all the varieties of literary form it may encompass, every Sacred Book is a prayer book, or at any rate contains a prayer book. "Well awake they arise, at all times, the disciples of Gotama," says the Dhammapada (301), "in whom, both day and night, the mind delights in meditation." The theme of meditation by day and by night appears in more than one of these Sacred Books, for example in the Book of Psalms (1:2). Even readers who take them in hand out of idle curiosity must remind themselves that to the devout in each of these traditions the Sacred Book is intended, as the Rig Veda says, to "stimulate our prayers" (3:62.10). Thus it represents, at least in some respects, a conversation between the Holy and the believers, both individually and collectively. Yet it represents as well a summons from the Holy to a life of obedience, submission, and service.

Stated that way, this quality of the Sacred Book involves a distinction that is in its technical formulation a product of Greek thought, systematized by Aristotle, but one that can be applied with striking accuracy to a great variety of religious and philosophical traditions:

the distinction between the active life and the contemplative life. Although the monastic movements that have arisen at one time or another in each of these six religions have had to make a special point of drawing the line between the two, chiefly for the sake of protecting contemplation from the intrusive demands of the outside world, the very use in many languages of the words "the service of God" to denote both worship and action is evidence for the universality of the idea and for the universality of the problem. Even so antireligious a thinker as Karl Marx seems to be invoking it when he says, in his *Theses on Feuerbach* of 1845, "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways. Nevertheless, the point is to *change* it." Interestingly, Marx, connoisseur of revolution though he was, spent much of his own life studying and "interpreting" the world, leaving it to other revolutionaries to do the actual "changing." Two members of the body, the eye and the hand, that have distinct tasks but must work together for the body to function properly; two points of the religious compass, the one at a fixed position and the other drawing circles everywhere; the intake and the output of the metabolism of faith; the *cantus firmus* in the lower clef and cadenzas in the upper clef—in some of these metaphors and in other similar ones, the subsequent interpreters of these six Sacred Books have related the active life to the contemplative life by distinguishing them, sometimes even distinguishing them sharply, yet without totally separating them.

Any prayer book, and especially a sacred book used as a prayer book, will manifest one characteristic of prayer pointed out by Friedrich Heiler, a sensitive and learned modern student of the phenomenon of prayer in many religious traditions: in what they pray and in how they pray, the world religions are at one and the same time the closest together, closer than in doctrine or in morality or in other ritual, but also the farthest apart. The readers of these Sacred Books would do well to keep that characteristic of prayer in mind. Above all, they must not forget that the Book does primarily have the praying individual

and the praying community in mind, and only secondarily (if at all) the inquiring reader, that it was written for worship more than for research. When the opportunity presents itself, during travel or in a travelogue, to witness a sacred book in actual use by a praying community in a feast or festival, such a picture truly is, as the cliché says, worth a thousand words, even a thousand of the words in the Sacred Book. In such a setting it becomes clear that the "paradox of understanding" mentioned earlier manifests itself with special force in worship and prayer. When, as the Dhammapada says (301), the disciples of Gotama, well awake, arise at all times and delight in meditation, both day and night, the experience of watching saffron-robed Buddhist monks at their prayers can seem very strange to a Western observer. Yet someone would have to be hopelessly bigoted as well as religiously tone-deaf not to be able to find somewhere in each of these six Sacred Books the accents of a spirituality to which it is possible for human beings of various backgrounds to respond and in which it is possible for them to pray, as deep calleth unto deep, across all the boundaries of all the world religions.

Part of the strangeness of the worship life of other religious traditions involves their specific practices and techniques of meditation, for example, the prayer wheel or rosary beads—the modern English word "bead" comes from the Old English word for "prayer"—accompanied by the recitation of verses from a sacred text. Nor are the gestures and postures of prayer the same everywhere, although some customs, such as kneeling for prayer and facing eastward to the rising sun, have appeared in many otherwise unrelated traditions. It is also a well-nigh universal tendency of religious groups to attach great importance to the precise details of worship practice, including the absolute accuracy of the very words being recited from the Sacred Book. In the absence of comprehensive and reliable statistics, it is probably fair to estimate that more controversies and schisms have arisen over these details than over any theological doctrine in the book. As uninitiated readers

reflect on a sacred book, therefore, it is important to remember that a phrase or sentence over which they can pass lightly may have been the object of intense passions or hatreds in the past or may still be, and even more important to keep in mind that, as the faithful have meditated and prayed over the hallowed text, they have sometimes been transported in religious ecstasy to the very vision of the Holy.

Probably the most universal of all devotional practices in the use of the Sacred Book is song. Not only is much of the sacred text a poem, as we have had occasion to point out several times, but it is a poem that has been set to music. For many passages, the song came before the written text and was transmitted from one generation of believers to the next in the form of a chant or hymn. As is evident from the very title *Hymns of the Rig Veda*, used not only in our set but in other translations, that applies especially to this Sacred Book of Hinduism. "Our songs and holy hymns go forth to Agni," the faithful sing there, "seeking the God and asking him for riches" (7:10.3). And again, a few hymns later, "Bring song and hymn to Agni. . . . Like an oblation on the grass, to please him, I bring this to Vaiśvānara, hymn-inspirer" (7:13.1). Therefore when the Hebrew psalmist exhorts, "Sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord, all the earth" (Ps. 96:1), the new song is in fact a very old song, but one that becomes new each time a new voice sings it for the first time or each time a genius like Johann Sebastian Bach sets it to music. Even modern technology, unfortunately, has no easy way of allowing the reader of a text to hear its melodies while looking at its words, although for at least some of the words in some of these Sacred Books that is far easier than it used to be. Absent such technological props, those who read one of these Sacred Books only as a written text—like those who read such epics as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—will read it with greater understanding if throughout their reading they are aware of a tune that is continually being sung *sotto voce* beneath the hearing and seeing of the words themselves.

Even the most extreme contemplatives, however, remain conscious of their obligations to others as part of their obligation to God. The very act of writing down a sacred book in response to a divine command or inspiration, and then of copying it over and over again for later readers, implies that the sharing of the vision is an essential component of the spirituality derived from the vision. In the words of one of the greatest of Western contemplative thinkers, Thomas Aquinas, "As it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so it is better to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate." That accent reflects the emphasis also of the Sacred Books. Thus Confucius warns in the Analects (4:25): "Moral force never dwells in solitude; it will always bring neighbors." The Gospel denounces as a "worthless, lazy servant" one who, upon being "given one bag of gold went off and dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money" instead of putting it to use (Matt. 25:14–30). Similarly, the Qur'ān promises "a higher place on the Day of Reckoning" specifically to "those who keep from evil and follow the straight path" (2:212). And Moses did not remain on Mount Sinai contemplating the ineffable mystery of the Holy, but came down from the mountain bearing the tables of the Law in which the will of the Holy for human life was set forth (Ex. 19:25). Indeed, so pervasive is the moral imperative throughout the world religions that philosophers of religion have repeatedly sought, especially since the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, to reduce the content of religion to its ethical requirements and, in doing so, to show that in their essentials all the religions are finally alike, with only the trivia of ritual or dogma separating them. While such a reductionism has repeatedly proved to be misguided and simpleminded, it does express the valid and universal insight of all the Sacred Books and of all the world religions, that, as the New Testament expresses it, "faith divorced from action is dead" (James 2:26).

Theocentric and other-worldly though the religious definition of

spirituality sometimes tends to be, that does not in any way negate the emphasis on this world and its responsibilities. The Tanakh reminds its readers: "God is in heaven and you are on earth" (Eccles. 5:1). Yet of the six Sacred Books presented here, it is probably above all the Confucian Analects in which that emphasis is articulated. Thus when someone asked about the meaning of ritual, "the Master said, 'I do not know' " (3:11), and the phrase "I do not know" sounds over and over when metaphysical issues are raised (5:7). But the Master can also explicitly enumerate "four of the virtues" found in a model of the good life: "In his private conduct he was courteous, in serving his master he was punctilious, in providing for the needs of the people he gave them even more than their due, in exacting service from the people he was just" (5:15). A modern reader who puts two or more of these Sacred Books side by side will repeatedly find large areas of similarity, especially in such prescriptions as these for the life of virtue and justice. The ground of hopes for world peace and for harmony within one neighborhood or nation lies in such similarity, and in the willingness of those who differ fundamentally on ultimate metaphysical and theological issues nevertheless to achieve a kind of ethical ecumenism in their common acceptance of these norms. Almost anyone who lives in the twentieth century anywhere in the world would be pleased to have as a neighbor or as a public official someone who lived up to the deepest meaning of the basic moral tenets that are set out in any of these six Sacred Books. As one quasi-proverbial version of a formula for civic and religious peace has it, "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity."

As one reads a sacred book, it is nevertheless not only the individual as neighbor or public official but an entire community that is often being addressed. That is why this introduction has suggested that it is appropriate to apply the term "people of the Book" not only to Judaism, for which the Qur'ān originally used it, but to the Christianity and Islam that share some of that Book, as well as to

Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, for each of which, albeit in different ways, there is a corporate as well as an individual message in the moral tenets conveyed by the Sacred Book. The many and varied cultures that have been shaped by these six Sacred Books bear evidence to how a sacred book can define the entire character of a people—its work habits, its definition of beauty and goodness, its dietary customs, its sexual mores, its view of history—for those who no longer share its fundamental beliefs as well as for those who adhere to its traditions. Each of the six, therefore, has also faced in the modern world the question of what is called in shorthand "theocracy," namely, whether those who do not believe may be compelled to submit to rules of life that come from the Sacred Book (in the order in which they appear here): kosher laws in the state of Israel, Sunday "blue laws" in the United States, the "Qur'ānic privilege" of polygamy in Egypt, the sacredness of the family in China, the reverence for cattle in India, the special status of monks in Southeast Asia. Some of the most divisive issues in many modern societies come from debates over this problem of theocracy. Howsoever those issues may be addressed, a minimum prerequisite for dealing with them would seem to be that all citizens, believers and unbelievers and semibelievers, gain an understanding of the context out of which the issues arise. And so, yet again: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" and "How can I without someone to guide me?"

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